Red of
The Redfields

Grace S. Richmond

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RED OF THE REDFIELDS

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By GRACE S. RICHMOND

Author of

"A Court of Inquiry," "Foursquare," "Mrs. Red Pepper," "Rufus," "Round the Corner in Gay Street," "Strawberry Acres," "Twenty-fourth of June," "The Second Violin," etc.

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CHAPTER I

IT WAS no longer necessary for Dr. Redfield Pepper Burns to employ a secretary or an office nurse. After fifteen rushing years of work in his profession he had quite suddenly gone to pieces—"shot," as he himself put it. The literal truth was that he had worn himself out at an early age. A machine can't be run overtime, year after year, with very little attention to oiling and cleaning and rest, without getting itself ultimately to the scrap-heap. Not that Burns was on any scrap-heap—or, if he was, that must be a place of much greater activity than is commonly supposed. But when an over-tired heart refuses to function without giving its owner frequent warning that it is liable to strike permanently, it becomes necessary for the owner to humour it.

Burns hated humouring that heart, but his distaste made no difference. The heart and his good friend, Dr. Max Buller, of the profession, had made it entirely clear to him that it was a matter in which he had no choice.

"Stop operating," commanded Buller, "or you'll stop some day in the middle of an operation. And that'll be good for neither you nor your patient. See?"

Burns saw. He had completed the last three jobs of that kind with considerable difficulty—he, who had always eaten up such work as if it were food.

"Stop active practice, Red, and come down to consultations——"

"Consultations! Baby food!"

"Nothing of the sort. They're the most important——"

"They're the biggest frauds known. Posing and compromising, backing and filling, trying to run two trains on one track! Neither willing to take the siding. The freight given the right of way while the limited frets and fumes, or runs by the signals, and the patient finds himself in a collision. If I can't practise I won't try to play the consultation game."

"Yes, you will, you can't get out of it. And it'll give you a chance to blow off a little steam now and then, and keep from exploding," Buller expounded. He knew his friend Red from A to Z and back again. "You've got to have something to do," he added, still more firmly.

"I'll go back to the lab," said Burns grimly.

"You will not. I'll not have you shutting yourself up in a two-by-four closet filled with gases and

gore. Blood-counts and test-tubes are not for you. Look after your children's hospital, in a general way. See a few old patients who can't go on living unless you feel their pulses from time to time. Take a trip to—er—South America, or——"

Burns had ended the interview by abruptly leaving Buller's office—good old Buller, who understood him so thoroughly that he didn't mind at all, but took a stride after Red's departing figure and clapped a hand on his shoulder, an action which said mutely: "I know, and don't you think I don't."

Burns had stood up to it; it wasn't the first test of the kind. The break hadn't come without plenty of warning. And the consultation practice had been forced upon him by a friendly profession which had not only wanted to do all in its power for him but which really needed and desired the benefit of his strangely sharp insight into the affairs of the sick human body. Those of the sick human mind also—and necessarily, since the two are so closely connected—frequently came to his attention. So it was all in the day's work when he received a letter from his friend, Dr. John Leaver of Baltimore, concerning a patient of his own whom he wanted to send to Burns for a look-over and advice as to future treatment.

It was not in his office—that was little used these days—but before his fireside, with Ellen his wife

sitting by, that Burns read the letter. He read it again aloud to her. Talking of consultants, Ellen was the best one he knew.

"Long ago, Red,"—wrote Leaver of Baltimore, at the top of his profession,—"I called you a specialist in human nature. You're more than that now, you're an authority. Now that you're not working quite so hard and fast as you'd like to, I fancy you're able to give even more time to certain types of cases that puzzle us all. I want to send you one. I've done the surgical work on his body—did some of it in France, after he crashed; the rest since we came back. He was a war correspondent—one of the best. Sneaked up into the air with a chum-aviator against orders, keen to see everything. And so forth. He's recovered up to a certain point; now he hangs fire. The slightest effort to go back to his old work—journalism—knocks him out again. Yet that's all he cares for. He's moody, cynical, hopeless. I've become extraordinarily interested in him. I know you will be. To give you a pointer, I should say he needs a special sort of contact he's practically never had. If you could introduce him to a certain type of home, with real people in it, the educated, understanding sort—particularly to a home with a mother in it (not a cushiony mother but one of character)—I should say it would be the best cure for him imaginable. I realize such places

are hard to find, but you may know of one. I don't expect you and Ellen to take him into your home—understand that. And with all devotion and admiration for Ellen, she's not just the sort I have in mind. I seem to recall that in such towns as yours there are occasionally to be found such people as I'm thinking of—the sort that modern fiction says don't exist. Felix Rowe also says they don't exist. If he could spend some time in such a place, under your general observation, he might be saved for future usefulness. As it is I'm at the end of my resources, and yet I can't give him up. How about it?"

Burns looked up. A broad-shouldered man of forty, with a sprinkling of gray in the thick red thatch which in his school days, and in combination with a quick-fire temper, had earned him the nickname of Red Pepper, he still looked the part. Though his face now showed lines of care rather deeply graven, his hazel eyes were as alert and keen as ever, with the most direct glance ever encountered in a world of evasions. A certain peculiar force of individuality never left him, even when, as now, he lay back in the comfortable depths of a big wing chair, reading this letter. And he had no sooner completed the reading of it than he sat up, sliding forward to the edge of his seat as if he were about to spring up, an attitude characteristic of the days not long past when he seemed always poised for action.

"A young cynic who's got through with his life, eh?" he commented. "I see why Jack thinks you wouldn't do—if I'd have him here, which I wouldn't, by jolly! He wants to get his patient the sort of a mother who'd pull him around by the hair of his head, if he needed it, at the same time that she'd tuck him in if he happened to need that. Well! Sends him to me to prescribe for him—and takes care to send the prescription along ahead of him. There's your city specialist—and there's your consultation! Doggone it, I don't know whether I'll have the chap here on my hands or not. I'm no psychiatrist."

"That's just what he thinks you are, Red. You always have been that, whether you knew it or not."

"And I'm not keen on youthful cynics, whether they've been through the war or not. I detest poses of every sort. Cynicism's always a pose—always."

"Unless, dear, a mind is really affected, as this one easily may have been, by dreadful experience in the war."

Red looked at her. She was as well worth looking at as she had ever been, being the type of woman in the late thirties whose charm has grown only the richer for her years. A certain lovely serenity in her had long been to him his life preserver through stress and strain.

"His mind isn't affected, really. His nerves may

be short-circuited,—undoubtedly are. Jack wouldn't send me a mental case; I know his ideas about those. I suppose I'll have to let this babe come along. Not conceivable to refuse J. L. anything, of course."

"You don't know that he's young, Red."

"Any man who needs a mother is young—and we all do, at that. I wish I hadn't lost mine. . . . I say, let's go and call on the Redfields. How would they do?"

"Would he want to be out in the country?"

"Can't call it the country. On the main road, trolley almost by the door, city line five miles away; village of Eastville only two, in the other direction."

"I presume Mr. Rowe would think it the far country, Red."

"Yes; think it the deep woods, the last outpost of civilization. That's what would be good for him, too, I'll warrant. Find out how people live away from the big centres—find out they don't stagnate, either. Stagnate! Len, you ought to know Marcia Redfield better."

Ellen Burns smiled. Red had always spoken admiringly of the Redfield family, his mother's cousins; had often suggested that the Burnses ought to see more of these nearest of kin left his side of the house. But he had always been too busy to take her; a call a year had been the most achieved. Nevertheless, Ellen had a very definite impression of what was

to be found in the old, square frame house by the side of the road on the other side of the neighbouring city. Red had been driving daily to that city for fifteen years, but had been always in too much of a rush to go the five miles beyond it necessary to reach the home of the Redfields.

"I've always thought I'd like to know her better, dear. Marcia is a personality, and would be, anywhere. It seems a pity that she has to spend her life as she does, since Lincoln lost his eyesight."

"Pity! It's a crime. Let's go and see her—now. Eh?"

"Very well. If I may just stop in town for one errand."

"All you like, after the call. This time I want to stay as long as we can. Never did see enough of Marcia. Time I did, and you, too. Ready in five minutes?"

"Ten, Red, please."

Burns's watch was in his hand, he was on his feet. You can't make a man over by pointing out to him that it is time for him to slow down—not even by convincing him of it. In some ways Redfield Pepper Burns never would slow down: he would stop short while the engine was running at a good speed, though not as it had run those fifteen years, ceaselessly. He did not intend to commit suicide, though there had been moments, when he first knew—— But

neither would he ever be content to play the invalid, anxiously conserving what remained. Activity would continue to be the first law of his life. If such mild activities as calling on the Redfields had now to take the place of those which in the old days had brought him, gloved and masked and keyed taut, to the operating table—well, at the least the call wouldn't be a commonplace one, and something would come of it. Nothing ever interested Red unless something might come of it.

Anyhow, he could drive his car as fast as ever; that didn't take anything out of him; rather it put it in. That car had once been a long, slim, open roadster. Now, out of unwilling deference to Max Buller's advice and Ellen's wishes, it was a high-powered, shining coupé of an excellent make. He had rebelled at it; had called it contemptuously "The Jewel Box." (The old car had been "The Green Imp.") But when he had found that he could cover the miles in it as fast as ever, and that Ellen could go with him in it on days which would have been devastating in the wind-blown open car, he had grudgingly admitted that glass had its uses. None the less, the windows were always open, even to the wind-shield, in all but the stormiest weather. Johnny Carruthers, that long-tried and devoted mechanic and man of all work, now seasoned and married but still devoted to Doctor Burns, spent

many an hour hosing and sponging and polishing the shining body, as of old.

"He always did make straight for the mud, if there was any," Johnny told his wife when she remonstrated over the time consumed on the car. "And always will. If he was a boy I don't think he'd be more careless about the splashing. What do I care? It's thankful I am he's here to drive it, though he don't care for it—nor me, neither—like for the Imp. This motor can't beat the Imp's, neither; that was the best motor I ever see; they don't make it no more—they can't, for the money. I'll say this one's a beauty, though. And he can get the speed out of her, same as ever—oh, boy! Why they don't pinch him! But then, every cop between here and the hospital knows the doctor; some of 'em's got kids he's saved for 'em."

So now, as usual, at the call of the garage telephone Johnny brought the Jewel Box around, looking ready for the best society, and Burns and Ellen got in. A fine pair they were to look at, Johnny thought, and knew he was not alone in the thinking. In the suburban town, as in the city, they were distinguished-looking people always. The broad, well-tailored shoulders, the touch of gray in the red hair, the upright bearing, the keen, worn face with its quick smile; Ellen's beauty and grace grown ripe and full; no wonder everybody knew or wanted to

know the Burnses; their position was of the best, everywhere.

Twelve miles to the city; five beyond to the Redfield home on the open road; they were there within the hour—four o'clock in the crisp October afternoon. The shabby—for want of paint—homelike old farmhouse under the great trees seemed to beckon them, and at the sound of the slowing motor the front door opened to them. Marcia Redfield stood smiling in the doorway. Even if one had not seen her before, one would know that here was a woman worth coming many miles to meet.

CHAPTER II

MRS. LINCOLN REDFIELD, mother of two sons and two daughters, all but one in college, didn't wholly look the part. Although there was a slight sprinkling of gray in her dark brown hair above her ears, the hair itself was so abundant, and she wore it in such a well-arranged mass at the crown, that the effect was not of age. There was always a warm colour in her slightly rugged face—an interesting face with a profile worth looking at. She was rather tall and decidedly well built; she held herself straightly erect and got about rapidly; at the very first sight of her you knew that here was a woman of force. She was of the type which might have made a college president, the superintendent of a great hospital, the head of almost any organization which calls for qualities of insight, balance, and power. When you found her only mending stockings in a big old house standing close to a suburban road—a house which had once been a farmhouse but which with the growth of the community was now too near its neighbours to suggest that any farm went with it—you wondered at the apparent waste of material.

But you wouldn't have wondered long. In the

sunny sitting-room, with its comfortable, slightly shabby chairs, its rows of bookcases, and its worn rugs, there were mostly two other occupants besides Mrs. Redfield. One was a middle-aged blind man with a keen hearing, and the other was an eager-eyed, rheumatic old man with no hearing at all. No doubt that Mrs. Redfield's work was cut out for her. No matter what one's qualifications one can't be president of a woman's college if one's husband has quite suddenly gone blind, and one's husband's father, widowed, has come to live with his son because no other member of his family has offered him a home.

Also, if there are sons and daughters away at schools, even though all four are doing what they can to help sustain themselves, it's up to somebody at home to carry certain burdens and keep expenses down—and income up—till all are entirely self-supporting. Summer boarders of the right type pay a good price, especially if the mistress of the house knows how to give her accommodations a certain atmosphere of mingled quaintness and what may be called country sophistication—a more valuable asset than almost any other, except a good table.

It hadn't been what Mrs. Redfield wanted to do, nor what her family wanted her to do. But when Lincoln Redfield went blind, two years before, and could no longer run his farm, there had been nothing

to do but to sell as much of the land as possible, including a large frontage which brought a high price on the rapidly developing main road to the city. Farming in such a locality was less profitable, now that the road was paved and the trolley line put through, than selling and investing the money. Marcia couldn't be spared to go out and earn, though she could have done it easily. There was more than one position of dignity she could have found ready to her hand. She was a college-bred woman; she had left great so-called advantages to marry the bright young farmer who had taken an agricultural course at the same place, and whom she had half educated in the liberal arts after she had married him. But Lincoln had needed her; his father lived with them, he also needed her. It had been for her to do the thing she could do without leaving him. And "city boarders" out for the summer are amazed and delighted to find old English prints on the walls of their bedrooms; they are willing to pay a high price for the right sort of blue and white porcelain on the table, and for fine linen and good cookery to go with it.

The boarders were all gone now; the last had left a week ago. Marcia Redfield had already cleaned their rooms and aired their beds, and set the house in order for the coming winter, when the Redfields could blessedly have themselves to themselves. She missed one or two of them, she admitted to herself;

the one or two who had been something more to her than boarders. The rest were well spared: boarders they had been, and nothing more. To them she had been a little awesome; they had not wanted to see more of her than was necessary—and hadn't. It was easy for her to accommodate them in that respect.

She came to the door at the sound of Burns's motor, her face eager as a girl's, and much more interesting to study, Ellen Burns thought as she looked up at her, than any girl's. Mrs. Redfield's style of dressing had an air of its own; an instinctive good taste always led her to select the plain, well-made clothes which her splendidly built figure carried properly. Even in the city, among expensively dressed women, she kept her look of quiet attractiveness, due wholly to this instinct of right selection, not to the price paid. Now, as she advanced upon the square front porch, she might have been, as was said of her in the first paragraph, any woman at the head of affairs requiring brains and force of character. And the best thing about her was that she was not too good to be true! Such women can be found, all over this broad country, and in just such places, if one is looking for them. Those who never come out of the big towns to look miss some of the most interesting and stimulating contacts their lives might have. And their skepticism as to the existence

of such bright beings is a matter of ignorance, not of basis upon fact.

"Marcia, we just suddenly realized we wanted to see you; that's what brings us," cried Burns, as his hand gripped hers. "Len, too—she admits the attraction. How's Linc? And his father? *And* the old boys I see dashing down from the barn, as usual. Couldn't keep house without a couple of collies, could you?"

To an excited barking, shortly hushed by Lincoln Redfield's stern "Stop it, you crazy dogs!" they went in.

Burns stopped short at the doorway of the sitting-room. "Marcia, how do you do it?" he exclaimed. "This always strikes me as about the jolliest room I ever knew, outside of home. Isn't it, Len?"

"It's Marcia," Ellen said, warmly. "She makes it what it is."

The tall, thin man by the fireplace, his eyes covered by dark spectacles, accentuating his pallor, had risen with a smile on his lined face. He spoke quickly. "Tell me what you see, Ellen. I want to hear it."

Burns looked at his wife. "Go to it, Len. You can tell him, though I'd like to."

"You can put in what she leaves out, Red," said Lincoln Redfield. "But I want to hear her first. I haven't seen the room for quite a while."

Ellen crossed over to him, to put her hand in his.

"I see a long, low-ceiled room," she said, "that looks as if it were the home of a country gentleman. The sun strikes on rows and rows of books, and all the red ones are put together in the centre of the two upper shelves. There are two red candles in brown wood candlesticks on the top of the bookcases, and between them, on the wall, is the portrait of—your mother, isn't it, Red?"

"My mother, the sister of Lincoln's father, so a Redfield. How long have you had that there, Marcia? I envy you that portrait; I like it better than mine."

"Yes, it's very fine of her, Red, but you can't have it. She's a Redfield, as you say, so she belongs here. Go on, Ellen. Lincoln's listening closely, you see."

"On the floors are woven rugs in brown shades, like the leaves out on the ground in front of the house. The chairs are nice, old-fashioned, comfortable ones. The big table is a gate-leg, and the bronze lamp on it has a parchment shade in browns and reds with a bit of old blue. That lamp gives the whole room an air, Marcia. But the best thing in it, Lincoln, is——" She paused, smiling.

"Here's where I come in." Burns was off, his eyes sparkling. "The best thing in it is a middle-aged woman with the look of a colt in her eyes—a colt perfectly capable of kicking up its heels and running

away, though it's learned to pull vigorously in the shafts. That's you, Marcia Redfield, and you're just my age, if I remember—which is no age at all, when the mood is on, eh?"

Their eyes met, as they laughed. Marcia Redfield didn't look an hour over thirty when she laughed, her fine, strongly marked eyebrows lifting, her even white teeth showing wholesomely, the ruddy tinge of colour in her warm-tinted skin glowing a shade deeper. Her laugh was a warm, melodious thing, contagious; as her voice in speech was deep and rich, with an occasional curious vibration in it, like that of some male actor of quality.

"No age at all, Red," she agreed. "Which is what I was—what we all were—when the boarders went last week. It was worth having them, to see them go. I swept them out at once, so I'm glad you came to-day to enjoy the emptiness without them."

"The boarders!" A swift frown supplanted Burns's laughter. "Since when have you had boarders? I didn't know about that."

"For the last two summers. Which shows how long it is since you've behaved like a cousin."

"Shows that I must have made winter calls, that's all. Well! That paves the way for what I've come to set before you. In an amiable, comprehending, humanitarian mood, are you, Marty?"

They sat down in the October sunshine. There was

a broad fireplace in the room, but the day was mild and no fire burned there; only some big oak branches, lately plucked, and showing autumn tints of umbers and siennas, filled the space. The door opened and an old man came in, whom the Burnses rose to greet. He was a very deaf old man, and walked with difficulty, bent over a cane. His face was sharp with years and austerity, yet it was an intelligent face, and apparently his eyes were as bright as his ears were dull. He could hear no general conversation, and took his seat to use his powers of observation upon the visitors. This was Father Redfield. As Ellen's glance went from the deaf old man to the blind man prematurely aged by his great loss, then back to Marcia, she wondered afresh at the youthful vigour of her. With the children all away—she noted photographs of them about the room—it would have been a sombre household but for Marcia. With her, it was a place alive.

Red broached his subject. He read aloud the letter from Dr. John Leaver of Baltimore regarding Felix Rowe.

"You see, Marcia," he commented, concluding, "when Jack Leaver says he's at the end of his resources about a patient, that means that everything surgical and therapeutical has been tried. Leaver hasn't time to go into the sort of thing he now feels is the only chance at a cure, so he wishes the patient

on me. He knows I'm supposed to have the time—now; incidentally, he knows I need knotty problems now and then to keep me from going to sleep. Evidently this is knotty, all right. He explicitly says my household isn't the place for this tired-of-life young man. I understand we have too many 'cushions'; he thinks Ellen would make him too darned comfortable. So she would—bless her! She just naturally couldn't help it, you know. While out here—well—the second morning you'd have him out sawing at the woodpile. And as I very well know, by personal experience, sawing wood on a frosty morning—or even in the middle of the night, if a fellow can't sleep, or is mad about something—is the best cure known for raw nerves. That's the matter with this chap—his nerves are raw, bleeding raw. Will you take this neurotic, Marcia Redfield?"

"How do you know he'll want to come, Red?" Lincoln Redfield put in, before his wife could reply. His thin face had flushed a little; he was leaning forward in his chair. "We're not much society for a young man, with all the children away. If Rusty and Nick and Jerry were home, that would be a different matter. Even little Jinny would help things, but she's over with Grandmother Rust for the fall and winter. The fellow'll get restless, won't he?"

"I hope so," Burns responded promptly. "As I

take it, that's the matter with him now—he's no energy, no interest. Restlessness is a sign of life, anyhow. And the children will be home for the holidays, I suppose. That'll be something for him to look forward to, judging by my recollection of them. A dose of Rusty would wake anybody up, wouldn't it? He won't be tired of life after she's walked on him; he'll be scrambling to his feet, to get back at her. This is Rusty, isn't it?"

He picked up a small framed photograph from the gate-leg table, scanned it closely, and took it over to Ellen. "Some ginger there, eh?" he demanded. "She's your girl all right, Marcia. All but the red hair, which comes from the Redfields, including me. She has your eyes, though. Say, that's a combination—red hair and brown eyes—warranted to wake anybody up. But according to my remembrance of Rusty, it'll be no use for him to get up any sentimental interest in her."

Marcia shook her head. "If I feared it would be I shouldn't think of taking him. But young men don't fall in love with Rusty. They play tennis with her. They shake hands with her. They discuss football with her. But when they want a girl to play the fool with they go elsewhere, cordially propelled by Rusty herself. And Nick backs her up in dismissing them, with Jerry assisting. No, Red, that's the last thing your Mr. Rowe will find here—and the

last thing he needs, I should say—or probably wants. Yes, I'd rather like to take him, if Linc agrees. We haven't too many interests. I'll give him Nick's room—till Christmas, if he stays that long. It's a tonic in itself, that room—full of Nick to the ceiling—young Nick, old Nick, Nick at every stage."

"Good! Great! You see I'm getting interested in this scheme. Bound to be, since J. L. insists. But principally, I'll admit, because it'll bring me out here now and then. And now let's talk about something else."

On the way home Burns's face was still touched with the reflection of the hour just spent.

"Isn't Marcia just the livest thing ever?" he exulted. "By jolly, I'd say that woman was wasted in a place like that if she didn't make such a big place of it. You didn't hear what Linc was telling me while you were upstairs looking at Nick's room. She can't leave him and Father Redfield, so other people come there. Their house is a regular community centre. To-day, since it's Monday, is about the only day in the week, according to him, that something isn't going on. I wish I could remember it all. A group of school teachers read together there; there's a girls' dramatic association; a young married women's sewing class. They're packing a box for Russia in some room upstairs; they're usually packing a box for somewhere, Linc says. The

minute the summer boarders are gone these activities begin. Oh, yes—the best thing is a big attic room where the boys of the neighbourhood have a club. Nick used to be the head of it. Linc says that club has sent a good proportion of boys to college. Why, what I heard makes me feel as idle as—Lucifer."

Ellen laughed outright at this. "Idle as Lucifer is a happy comparison, dear," she pointed out. "That's just as idle as you are."

"Idle as—something else is what I meant, though. Well! I'm coming over often, you bet your life, when my baby cynic gets here. Why we haven't seen more of the Redfields all these years is beyond me. I like 'em. I'm proud of 'em. I'm proudest of Marcia, who's such a wonderful graft on the family tree. Redfield's my middle name literally, and it's going to be my middle name in a new sense, from now on."

"If it's to be yours it will have to be mine, too, Red. I'm really wonderfully attracted by the Redfields. And not only Marcia. Her husband is an interesting man. It isn't all duty that holds her to him; it's more than that. He may be blind; he's not lost his hold on life."

"She wouldn't let him."

"No, but he wouldn't lose it anyway. His mind is keen as ever. I'll wager, Red, he keeps her

stimulated, as she does him, only in a different way."

"Sharp eyes, you're undoubtedly right—and I hope you are. I've never known Linc very well, it's true. He was always out in the fields or off on some business when I made my brief calls. Well, anyhow, we've got something new to do together, Len, that Max Buller won't disapprove of and call me down for. Thank the Lord for that, if it's only visiting a shabby old farmhouse with—by George!—with a framed photograph of the nave of Durham Cathedral hanging over the tinkly old square piano. Did you see that? That's the key-note to the whole works, come to think of it, isn't it? That love of the high, fine thing, whether indoors or out. Say—isn't it?"

He didn't need to look at her for the answer to that. But he did look. He would never get over the habit of doing that, so sure was he of the response he wanted.

CHAPTER III

BACK at the house Red and Ellen Burns had left, Marcia Redfield finished the doing of several things their call had interrupted. Then, when she had read aloud for an hour to her husband, she put on her hat and coat and let herself out into the October evening. Down the road toward the village she went, with a quick, light step like a girl's, her head up, her lungs drawing in deep breaths.

Halfway to the village she met a tall figure which stopped before her. A soft hat came off and remained off, and a crisp, pleasant voice said, "Well met, Mrs. Redfield, if you say so, too. May I turn around and walk with you? I was just coming out to the house."

"I'm delighted to see you, Andy Carter, as you know well enough. But why not go on to the house and talk with my two men till I get back?"

"Because I want to be with you—you can't turn me off like that." He had wheeled and was gently forcing her to keep on walking, with a hand on her arm which he withdrew when he had accomplished his purpose. "I haven't seen you for a dog's age, and I want to tell you again how I like your '*Arrow Tips*,' for my *Arrow*. I find people are reading them

with a gusto, even more eagerly than they read Rusty's occasional column from college, though they like that a lot, too. But you get something into yours that makes 'em tingle. I wish I knew how you do it. I can edit a small-town paper, and I think I know how to make it popular, but there's a gentle snap to your paragraphs—if I may try a paradox—that makes people eat up those tips like fresh asparagus in the spring after a winter of canned beets."

She laughed. "You're a flatterer. It's difficult to make much out of the little village happenings without degenerating into actual gossip."

"I know, but you do it. I haven't yet got over one '*Tip*' last week. I can say it by heart:

"The Thursday Reading Club is now concentrating its efforts upon a study and understanding of the trees native to this region. We thought we knew a maple when we saw one, but it turns out we knew only the one in our own dooryard. At our latest meeting an animated discussion, at times conducted by all the members of the Club at once in varying tones and pitches, brought out merely the fact of our intense ignorance. No promoter of any particular variety of maple was able to keep the ascendency over the remainder of the Club for more than a minute at a time. One thing only was definitely determined upon—to wit: that he who cuts down a maple tree planted by his father or his grandfather, for any reason whatsoever but one vital to the health or happiness of the entire community, commits a depredation, and he shall be dealt with by a jury composed of all the most enthusiastic and bloodthirsty members of the Club.

You know, Mrs. Redfield," the speaker concluded, his voice full of satisfaction, "that sort of thing simply

isn't done, in the reports of the meetings of a reading club or any other kind of club—not in the local village paper. The reports of such meetings make the most deadly serious reading in the world, and nobody but the members of that particular club ever reads 'em. But your skits! My word, who would think of skipping them? Somebody always gets hit off, yet there's never cause for offense."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

"Absolutely. Except with me. How dared you say in that column that the editor needs a new hat? I do, of course. But for you to observe that you thought its present condition due partly to the heated functioning of my brain in the late discussion over the School Board, and partly from its having been thrown so often into the ring—why, do you know what impertinence that was, Madam? The edition was exhausted before it was fairly off the press, so many delighted subscribers came in to buy an extra copy. '*Who* writes that *Arrow Tips* column?' asked they, and when I gave them three guesses they hit on everybody but you. They seemed to think none but an Irish male could have perpetrated that hit at the hat!"

"By the way, Andy," said the columnist, "is that the hat which you have in your hand? Put it back on your head—this breeze is chilly."

"Yes, Mother," said the daring Andy. He had

grown up in the town with the Redfields, but had been away many years. He had come back only two years before to put all he had saved and all he had learned into the old weekly newspaper which had faithfully recorded all his comings and goings from his earliest college days. Motherless from boyhood, he had adored Marcia Redfield all his life of twenty-seven years; Rusty and Nick and Jerry had been his sister and younger brothers, and little Jinny he had carried on his shoulder.

The two walked on, Carter's hat still in his hand, and his thick sandy hair ruffled by the keen October wind.

"It's great to have a talk with you all to myself like this," the young man said, as they neared the centre of the village of Eastville, after the two-mile walk from the outskirts where the Redfields lived. "Let's see—we've mentioned Nick and Jerry and the paper, the new linotype machine, the cost of gasoline for the press engine, the local elections, the situation in English politics, the campaigns for devastated France, the advisability of my getting a new suit in spite of the fact that the cost of printing paper has gone up, and—well, I think—everything except Rusty. She skipped me with a line o' type this week—something about a Senior Play in which she had practically all the lines and so could give me none. I suppose you've heard."

His tone was casual, but his hearer understood that this omitted subject was to him by far the most important of all. Her sympathies were with him, for she knew her elder daughter put most of her spare time into the long weekly letters home, intended to keep her family amused and informed of all her life away from them.

"This week's letter was full of the Play, too," Rusty's mother told him. "If R. R. R., as she loves to sign herself, weren't such a quick study she never could get up her part and keep her school work up at the same time. But she seems to be glorying in this part, which fits her pretty well. Wouldn't you think she'd make a convincing small boy—'*Mickey*,' by name? You know she always wants to play male parts, but seldom can because she hasn't the height, though she can assume a magnificent bass voice upon occasion."

"I'll say she can," Carter murmured, chuckling at a recollection of one of Rusty's girlhood pranks when she had—at midnight—deceived an investigating neighbour into thinking she was her own father, at an upper window.

"The only thing that bothers her seems to be the management of that crop of red curls. She threatens to bob her hair——"

An alarmed masculine protest interrupted: "Great guns! You won't let her do that!"

"My dear Andy, if she decided to do it the scissors would be cutting into it even as we talk. But it seems that the thought of what I—and possibly you—would say, has held her hand."

"*Me?* Did she mention me?" The question was shot at her explosively.

"Not at all. I merely recall that you and she have held certain arguments upon the subject in the past."

"I hope she doesn't recall 'em. If she thought I was against it she most certainly would do it," declared the young man.

"Not necessarily. You have more influence over her than most people. Do you imagine Rusty would contribute to any newspaper but yours, in her busy Senior year?"

"Don't you think she would?"

"I do not.—But I'm stopping here, Andy, and I'll say good-night. It's good to have met you. You're always next to Nick and Jerry, you know, as my adopted son."

She had paused in front of a small house, where, as Carter knew, lived an elderly couple house-bound by infirmity the year round. He understood that they would be the lighter of heart for her visit, but he was loath to let her go.

"Yes, I know—bless you," he said, warmly. "It means everything to me. If I'm not a son in earnest some day it won't be my fault, you know. Tell me

one more thing that was in Rusty's letter," he added, persuasively, with a hand on her tweed coat-sleeve.

"Oh, yes—I have a message for you from her," Rusty's mother admitted, as if it were an afterthought.

"You have—and would have let me go without it, you teasing person. No, you wouldn't—you're too good to me for that."

"Very well, then. Here it is. 'Tell Andy Carter,' wrote my child, 'that his latest editorial on the School Board was a peach, but that the long one before it on the water question was absolutely bum.' She added: 'You're not responsible for the language, Mother, so report it verbatim, as becomes the columnist of the *Arrow*, a paper whose motto seems to be *We shoot to hit!*'"

Carter was laughing, both ruefully and delightedly. "That sounds like Rusty," he declared, "so it's most welcome, though it does 'shoot to hit.' I'll be even with her for that in next week's issue. *Must* you go in? Well—good-night, good-night!"

His tall, lanky figure stood motionless till she had gone in and closed the door. Then he went striding away down the road.

"Now why can't all women—and mothers—be as interesting as that?" he was thinking. "No wonder Rusty's what she is. Who wouldn't want a mixture of *that* blood in the veins of his children? Red,

red blood it is, yet somehow as blue as there is in the country. Red and blue make purple—the purple of royalty, by George!"

The fancy pleased him, and from this point to his own door—not far away at the foot of a narrow stairway which led up the side of a ramshackle old building to his rooms above the office and pressroom of the *Arrow*—the editor was whistling gaily.

"'Absolutely bum,' was it, Miss Ruth Rust Redfield?" he questioned a distant young person. "All right—we'll see what we can say in our next to make you take that back!"

CHAPTER IV

MRS. TRACY ROWE scanned her son's plate anxiously.

"Felix, you haven't eaten a thing!"

"Eaten all I want, thank you."

"Why *don't* you have an egg, if you don't care for the cereal or the waffles? Eggs are so strengthening. Nora, bring Mr. Felix——"

Felix Rowe lifted a languid, thin hand. "No eggs, please."

"A glass of milk, then. Felie, if you knew how you worry me——"

"I detest milk, and you know it, Mother. Why can't you stop worrying about my breakfast? The coffee's all I want. Another cup, Nora, please."

"No, but you *oughtn't* to drink so much coffee, Felie. Don't bring it to him, Nora."

Felix turned in his chair and glanced at Nora, who was staring uncertainly at the autocratic young man, so much more forceful in his weakness than his mother in her attempted authority. "Bring me the coffee, please," he said.

"Oh, *Felie!*"

At the other side of the table Tracy Rowe lifted a

bothered glance from the voluminous sheets of the morning paper which he was hurriedly scanning. "For the Lord's sake, Bessie, why can't you let him alone?" he growled. "If he can't eat he can't, and that's all there is of it."

"But that's just *why* he's so nervous. His nerves need feeding—that's what Doctor Leaver said. But *no* stimulants."

"Bother Doctor Leaver. Coffee's not a stimulant—not what you can call one. Take your coffee, Felix. And then come on down to the office with me. That'll give you something to think of till train time, anyhow."

"Thanks, Father. I think I'll stay quiet till train time—if I go at all."

"Well, don't go if you don't want to." Mr. Rowe put down his paper and looked as anxiously at his son as his wife had done, though he didn't mean to let it show. His face was fat where hers was thin, therefore he couldn't look as harried as she, in any case, which was a blessing. "I haven't thought much of the plan, any of the time. I paid Leaver to treat you himself—and a good price he'll ask, too—not to send you off to some country doctor, which is all this Brown is, as I understand it."

"Burns," his wife corrected him. "He told us some queer thing about the man's having red hair—they call him 'Red Pepper Burns.' That doesn't sound

to me like any first-class man—a nickname like that. What I really think is that Doctor Leaver is hopeless of doing anything for Felix, so he sends him off to this man——"

"Oh, I've no doubt this Burns is a good man," her husband interposed hastily. "Only I'd rather have Felix around here. My idea is if he'd just forget his nerves he'd be all right. If you don't want to go off up there, Felix, suppose you come down to the office with me, and we'll see if we can't find something to interest you. There's a deal on to-day and some big men coming. You could sit in a corner; it'd take your mind off yourself. That's all you need—get your mind off yourself. You brood too much. A fellow can't brood, and there isn't any need of it, either, in a busy world. If you'd just——"

It was the thousandth time Tracy Rowe had said it. It was the ten thousandth time Bessie Rowe had said the sort of thing she had to say. If Felix would eat—would feed his nerves—would think of something besides himself—would go down to the office and take an interest——

That was all they could do for him. Felix got up abruptly from the table with the idea that if he had to hear it again he should go to pieces utterly and finally. But he managed to keep hold of himself long enough to say, with some degree of steadiness in his tone, "I'm going. I promised Leaver I'd

try this Doctor Burns. If you'd stop fussing about me there'd be more chance——"

And then he went out and closed the door behind him, and somehow kept himself from slamming it violently in their anxious, stupid faces. For they were, both of them, just plain stupid; and he knew it. Why they couldn't understand that everything they did and said was the worst possible thing to do and say to a chap in his condition was more than he could tell. He had little doubt that Dr. John Leaver was sending him off as much as anything to get him away from these devoted, unintelligent parents.

The moment the door closed behind her son Mrs. Rowe began to cry.

"I don't know what we're g-going to do with him," she sobbed into her handkerchief. "He isn't f-fit to go 'way up there alone. I don't know b-but I ought to go with him."

Her husband, looking as disturbed as a man with a face like a full moon may, got up and came around to her side of the table. He saw that she had eaten no more than Felix; she had been watching her son too closely to think of her own plate.

"There, there, Bessie—don't give way," he said, patting her shoulder with his plump hand. "I s'pose I could go with him myself; maybe I ought to. But I've got this deal on—'twould be hard to get away. I don't know's he'd want you to go with

him—and then again maybe he might. He's awful nervous wherever he is, that's sure. 'Tisn't such a very long trip up there, though. He'll get on the sleeper to-night and he'll be there to-morrow afternoon. They'll meet him, I presume—this Doctor Brown——"

"Burns, Tracy. Oh, I don't *like* this doctor's having such a nickname; it doesn't seem dignified. Red Pepper Burns! I'm afraid he's some sort of a quack doctor."

"Now, now—you know Doctor Leaver wouldn't send him to anybody like that. His best friend—that's what he said he was—this Br-Burns. He's all right, Momma, don't you worry."

"You're worrying yourself, Tracy—you know you are. He's our only son, and——" Her thin face, mottled in red spots with her crying, went down into her handkerchief again; she blew her pointed, thin nose violently.

"If he'd just take an interest in something else," Tracy Rowe said once more, in despair. "Everybody has to take an interest in things—they can't keep thinking about themselves all the while. Now this deal I've got on to-day—why, the minute I strike the office I'll be all wrapped up in it——"

"Yes, and you'll forget all about Felix!" she cried. "That's the way with a man—you can be all wrapped up in a deal, and leave me to worry myself sick over

Felix. I always *have* worried about him. When he was over there in France you could get all wrapped up in your business, and I just had to stay home here and think and think. It's just the same now——"

"Well, if I couldn't forget my troubles once in a while I'd go bust like Felix," said he, defiantly. "It's thinking about yourself and your troubles that takes the backbone out of folks. Lord knows I'm worried as you are about the boy, but I've got to keep on sawing wood at the office, to pay for doctors like Leaver and this Brown. But I'll be up this noon, and I'll try to have things fixed so I can stick around till he goes. If you think best to go with him, Bessie—and he wants you to——"

"Oh, he won't want me to." Her tone was despairing. "Seems like I couldn't be a mother to him—he won't let me. I've worried about him all his life, but it seems like he never thinks of that at all. He never wants to be home; he never *has* wanted to be home since he first went away to that boys' school. And then to college. It was a *mistake*, Tracy, sending him to college; he's never been the same boy since."

"He would go. He hasn't been a boy you could direct—not since he was a little fellow. He's always had these notions about things, not like ours at all. Well,"—he sighed, and pulling out a big handkerchief of fine linen—he was immaculately dressed as

any prosperous business man is in these days—he wiped a broad brow which was beginning to perspire—"I've *got* to go, Bessie. Derwent and Atwater'll be there. I can't be late or it won't look right to 'em. You buck up and don't let him see you crying—it'll discourage him and make him think we're scared about him. Lord knows we are, but we can't let him see it. I'll be back for lunch—a little late, maybe. Good-bye, Momma. There, there!"

His broad hand patted her cheek, he stooped and kissed it, as well. She burst into a fresh flood of tears, but he had consulted his watch, and he now left her and crossed the room hurriedly, with a glance from the window at the street outside. At the curb a handsome closed car stood waiting. "Haven't got but five minutes," he muttered, and all but ran out into the hall. A moment later the big black-walnut door with its inset of glass in variegated colours closed behind him—a door which of itself, to any beholder who stood regarding it from the outside for the first time, would have betrayed the uneducated tastes of those within.

Upstairs, in his own room, a large, square room with a bathroom adjoining, Felix was beginning to pack the small leather-covered trunk which had come back with him a year before from Paris. It was travel-worn as good leather may be—which renders it more suggestive of worldly adventure—

with the remains of many labels still clinging to it here and there. Doctor Leaver had told his patient to go prepared to remain for some months, and had urged his taking whatsoever effects would help to keep him contented. Once such a suggestion would have set Felix taking down books from shelves, opening desk drawers for writing materials in large quantities, even to putting in such comforts as a small electric lamp for his bedside, and fittings for the temporary desk he would need to equip when he reached his destination. Special shaving soap, his bath sponge, tubes of tooth-paste—there were dozens of things that ought to go into that trunk. Yet to-day after he had emptied the contents of two drawers into the tray, folded a couple of suits, and hunted out some gloves and handkerchiefs, he sat staring at the trunk as if he could think of nothing more with which to fill it.

"Felie, want me to help you pack?"

Mrs. Rowe had bathed her eyes and reinforced herself with a fresh handkerchief. Her pointed nose was still red with her weeping, and her hand trembled on the doorknob, but her tone was plaintively cheerful. She came in rather timidly, as if she didn't know how this strange son of hers might meet her advances. He was never anything but polite to her—always had been so since he had first returned from the preparatory school to which he had

insisted on going and from which he had brought away new ideals of filial behaviour. But she had never been able to come very near him; he had always reservedly held her off. Often and often he seemed to her not her son at all; and now, since his breakdown after the war, he had retreated an incredible distance not only from her but from his whole environment.

He had been, she thought, a beautiful boy; his features had been uncommonly attractive—once. His face still showed a certain distinction of looks; but his skin was so sallow, his eyes so circled with dark shadows, his mouth set in such a line of unhappy obstinacy, that his whole aspect was still to his mother unfamiliar, even alien. His thin figure, of a medium height, was stooped; his chest was slightly contracted; looking at him one would expect to see him cough hollowly. He didn't cough; the doctors said that with care he would never break down in that way; but to Mrs. Rowe the assurance was of small comfort. She would almost rather, it seemed to her, have him a cheerful consumptive—she had seen some such—than the melancholy, listless, nervous invalid he had become.

Felix barely glanced up as his mother came in. "I'm packed," he stated briefly. "Thank you," he added, remembering. He had risen slowly to his feet. His mother never could get over his showing

her this deference; he had done it ever since he had come home on his first vacation from the preparatory school; it had marked for her a new era in her admiration for him.

"Don't stand up, dear," she hastened to say. "You aren't very strong, and you've got quite a journey before you. How'd you like it if—" she hesitated, afraid to suggest her accompanying him, and turned the sentence into something else—"How'd you like it if I just looked over what you've put in, and see if you've left out anything? A man isn't very good at packing—leastways, Poppa isn't."

"Everything I need is in," Felix assured her carelessly. "I'm not taking any more than necessary. I may not stay very long."

"Oh, but you must stay as long as Doctor Burns thinks best," she said, in the same anxious manner with which it seemed to him she said everything, and which irritated him to madness. "It's quite a trip up there, and Poppa and I want you to get the good of it. Whatever the Doctor says for you to do, you want to do—'specially your food. He'll likely tell you to eat special things, to feed your nerves, and it'll be wrong of you, Felix, if just because he isn't there to see that you do it, you *don't* do it. I don't know where you're going to be, of course, Doctor Leaver said he'd leave that to Doctor Burns, but he said it wouldn't be with him. It'll be some

nice place, and I hope the cooking will be good. But even if it isn't as tempting as our home cooking, you want to eat, Felix. And milk you always *can* drink. People can *live* on milk, if they take enough, and it's the best thing in the world for nerves. If you——"

Felix had reached the end. He went with a quick stride across the room and took his mother by the arms, not ungently, but with a shaky energy which she understood to be overwrought.

"If you don't stop telling me what to eat, Mother," he said, between his teeth, "I'll go to bed and stay there. I know you mean it for my good, but I simply can't stand another word about it. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll lie down till lunch time. If you don't mind I'll have something sent up on a tray. I——"

As he looked at her the weak tears began to flow again from under her reddened lids.

"Oh, Felie!" she breathed. "Your last lunch at home! Up here on a tray! And Poppa's coming home on purpose, when he's got a deal on and ought to be taking the men to luncheon, same as he always does when it's important. Dear boy, *couldn't* you—just to please Momma——" She choked and laid her head down on his angular shoulder.

Let it be told to Felix Rowe's credit that he bit back the wild words on his tongue—the super-expletives which it would somewhat have relieved his tension

to let burst forth. His "*last lunch at home!*"—Well, he hoped it would be, if he died on the way North in the train—or jumped off it——

"All right," he said, and for the life of him he couldn't do more than put a hand upon her agitated shoulder. "I'll be down—if you'll let me rest now. I—didn't sleep very well last night."

She insisted on seeing him stretch himself upon an over-stuffed couch at the foot of his bed, and tucked a heavy striped-silk blanket about his shoulders. She pulled down the shades without opening the windows, assured herself that the radiator was hot, and tiptoed out, the tears still oozing. When she was gone Felix scrambled off the couch, flung open the windows to the warm October air, and turned off the heat from the radiator. The blanket he kicked across the floor.

Ten hours later, having somehow lived through the day, Felix stood in the lower hall, ready to go. At the moment he was alone, both his father and his mother, who were to go with him to the station, having gone back after something or other of their equipment for the drive. He looked with heavy eyes about the hallway, through the wide open doorways to the rooms on either side, and hated the whole place with the hatred which, as a lad, returning from the great private school where he had had his first

sight of beautiful interiors, he had felt when he had begun to realize the garish, expensive commonplaceness of every aspect of his father's house. From the dark, figured paper heavy with gold which covered the walls, to the costly, ugly, flowery rugs which lay upon the waxed yellow-oak floors; from the bizarre electroliers of highly coloured mosaic, to the wide-spreading brilliant red-shaded lamps which to his eyes at night lent the place the look of a house of ill fame, it seemed to him there was not one redeeming line or hue or shape. Bad taste, execrable taste, had selected and assembled every picture, every chair, every abominable gew-gaw with which the rooms were filled. The very hat-rack at the side of the entrance upon which visitors were to perch their headgear was a carven black-walnut figure of a slave girl extending brown arms to receive the offerings of those who were willing to enter—a figure typical of the enjoyment of the owner in choosing always the eccentric and elaborate rather than the simple.

As he turned from this look at the home he was leaving Felix felt the same sense of relief he had long felt whenever he went away. At least he shouldn't have to see it all again for a good while. Anything was better—anything—than that his tortured nerves should have to rebel hourly against living in a place he so detested. As the home of his father and mother he had endured it; it was fortunate now to

have a fresh excuse for leaving it, as he had expected to do long ago, for good.

He rode to the train between the two middle-aged people; the chauffeur was shut away by glass from hearing what was said. What was said was a reiteration of all that had been said up to this hour. Felix did his best; he turned his head from his mother to his father, as either spoke to him, and seemed to listen with deference. He saw his mother's pointed nose, powder doing its worst to conceal its redness; her expensive, too-much-befeathered hat slipping back a little upon her scanty hair, as it always did, to her son's annoyance; her white gloves a little soiled; her shoes too narrow upon her badly shaped feet. His father was well dressed; his clothes only a trifle more conspicuous than would have been to Felix's taste; the pin in his scarf only a little too gorgeous. Somehow, Felix considered, no man could err quite so far in his selections of apparel and ornament as a woman—her range of choice was wider—she could do more awful things to herself for the same amount of money. His mother had always had an idea that she owed it to her family to be "dressy"—that was what she called it!

But after all they were his father and mother, and they loved him, and he was not without a certain affection for them, strangers though they had long seemed to him. He appreciated it that they wanted

to see him off, that they were solicitous that he should have every comfort. Mr. Rowe had secured a drawing-room for him. On his way through the station the elder man had stopped at a news-stand and bought a sheaf of evening papers. Felix saw him glance at the cigarettes in the case below, and knew his father wanted to equip him with these, too, but was restrained by the knowledge that his mother would certainly protest—they were bad for the invalid's nerves! Felix thought with some amusement of his own well-filled pocket case—of the extra packages in his bag. That was one thing, anyhow, that nobody could do to him, stop his smoking! He'd have to have some means of soothing those jumping nerves, if all the doctors in the country were against him.

The train was called. Mr. Rowe got himself and his wife through the gates with their son, with a fee and a whispered "He's sick—see?" They went down the platform with him, his mother clinging to his arm. When they reached his car Felix turned to her and, stooping, kissed her—as affectionate a kiss as he could make it, for he was suddenly more sorry for her than he had been before. In spite of all her errors of dress and manner, her love for him was very real; he couldn't help seeing that she suffered. He found himself wishing he could care more for her—she deserved it. As for his father, Felix had always understood that he meant to be a good

father, and if he wasn't the sort of father his son would have liked to have him, that couldn't be helped. At school and college Felix had sometimes seen the sort of fathers he *would* have liked—educated, keen-eyed men of affairs, with whom their sons were proud to walk and to whom they were eager to introduce their friends . . . But he looked now at Tracy Rowe and knew that the one biggest thing a father could give his son was his. He shook hands heartily, looking his father in the eyes. At least in the moment of parting it was possible to feel something of that which he knew he ought to feel.

"Take care of yourself, boy," said Rowe, a sudden hoarseness in his voice. "Do what Doctor Brown says. And anything you want, you have it. Momma and I want you to be comfortable, every way."

"And you'll write often, won't you, Felix?" His mother clung again to his arm, her lips shaking. "I'll write every day, if you'd like to have me. Now you'll go to bed right away, won't you, Felie? And let the porter bring you breakfast in your drawing-room—only *don't* drink a lot of coffee, dear, it's so bad for——"

Disengaging himself, Felix climbed slowly upon the platform, followed by his father.

"I want to see where you are," explained Mr. Rowe.

The coloured porter caught him by the arm.

"They won't be time, Mistah," he warned him. "We're late. He got a drawing-room? Yessah, all right—Ah'll see to him."

From the station platform they waved at him, his mother's costly befeathered hat slipping still farther back upon her head in her agitation. She waved her hand in the soiled white glove, and brushed away a tear with it. His father took off his hat and waved it; they were still waving as they passed from Felix's sight.

At midnight, awake in his berth, surreptitiously smoking one cigarette after another, the son still saw them—the good, stupid people who loved him, and from whom he was mightily glad to get away. He wondered if they could possibly guess that he was glad, and decided that they were too stupid even for that.

But in this he was mistaken. Somehow, for all their stupidity, they knew.

CHAPTER V

"HOW'LL I know him?" asked Johnny Carruthers.

"Look for a well-dressed young man with a pale face, who doesn't seem to be caring whether he gets off at this station or the next one," said Dr. Redfield Pepper Burns.

"Lots of 'em try to look like that," declared Johnny

"This one doesn't try—he really doesn't care. You'll know the difference. If all signs fail, ask him if he's Mr. Rowe. He'll get off a Pullman. He'll not be carrying his own bags."

Johnny nodded. "I get you," he said. "Not even if they don't weigh much," he added. "I'll get him."

He did. He brought Felix Rowe to the door of Burns's office. Between the station and the house he had made two attempts at friendly conversation, to which his passenger had responded with monosyllables. As Johnny looked after Rowe, moving slowly up the walk to the vine-clad brick house, he said to himself:

"I bet I know why Doc didn't meet him himself.

He'd got to get a fellow like that on his own ground before he'd start to talk to him. Of all the tired-of-himself-ers I ever saw, this one looks the worst. But Doc'll wake him up, you bet your life. Doc can wake 'em up just as well as he ever could."

So Felix Rowe sat in Doctor Burns's office, and found himself obliged to admit, at first sight of his new physician, that he had met somebody whose appearance seemed to justify the opinion Dr. John Leaver had of him. He saw a broad-shouldered man of over forty with a touch of gray in hair so red and thick that there was something boyish about it; saw the lines of care in the face which was that of one who had lived his life accomplishing something; saw—because they immediately encountered his own and held them—eyes which looked as if they never missed anything worth seeing. And there the inventory stopped, by reason of a certain peculiar barrier in this village doctor which prevented instant analysis. Felix had expected to read Doctor Burns with one appraising glance; he put the reading off a little.

On his part Burns saw that here was indeed a "case" for him. Felix Rowe was well neither physically nor spiritually. He was too thin for his height, too pale for his age, too "high-tension" for his good. In spite of a manner which was so quiet and contained that it might have deceived other eyes, Felix looked

quite as tired, bored, and difficult to manage as was to have been expected from Leaver's letter about him. He looked above all unhappy. His dark, sallow skin spoke of under-nourishment. The black hollows under his eyes told of sleepless nights. The lines about a mouth too young to show them shouted of hard experience known too early.

The two exchanged a little conversation about the journey, and then Burns sat back in his chair, continuing to regard Felix intently, after his own fashion.

"Well, Doctor Leaver tells me your recovery is hanging fire."

Felix looked uneasily back at him, out of narrowed eyelids.

"Yes, Doctor Burns."

"He's told me exactly what he's done for you, and given me a general idea of what the war and life generally did for you before he took hold. So we won't go into that. I don't think we'll go into much of anything to-day. I understand you're willing to put yourself under my care for a while?"

"I agreed to that. I might as well be here as anywhere."

"I see. That makes it easy to begin. And we're going to begin by taking you to the place where I want you to stay. You're not too tired to drive a little matter of seventeen miles, after your jour-

ney"—he didn't put it as a question—"so we'll start at once."

"Where is this place?" Felix felt a sudden suspicion, one that hadn't occurred to him before. Had he allowed himself to be caught in some trap? Did they think—what did they think?

Burns's tone was casual. "Cousins of mine, living in what was once a farmhouse on the main road between a city and a village. It's all right, Rowe. You can walk away from it to-morrow if you don't like it. Maybe you won't. Depends on you. And as by the time you get there it'll be their hour for supper, we'll go along at once. Ready?"

Well, this certainly was a most extraordinary way, thought Felix, for a doctor to receive a patient. He had expected at least an hour's inquisition—perhaps two; questions, examinations, prescriptions, *pro*scriptions; diet lists, advice—advice by the yard. But perhaps he was to get that on the way to this place where he was to be taken. No doctor whom he had ever met had missed a chance to talk to and at and about his patient; of course Burns would begin that the moment they were in the car. Felix waited.

They went out and got into the car; Felix saw now why the chauffeur hadn't brought in his luggage; why his small leather trunk remained strapped on the back. At a nod from Burns, Johnny Carruthers got

out and the two men got in. A minute later they were off. Three minutes later, having passed the boundaries of the small suburban town, the car was humming along at a speed the passenger hadn't expected. This middle-aged doctor was a hustler, then. Drove not so much as if he were in a hurry as if that were the way he was accustomed to drive, without thinking anything about it. The windshield was open, and in the waning warmth of the October afternoon the air came in like a small whirlwind. Felix would have liked to shut it out, but his companion didn't seem to think of it. Burns's face had a tanned, ruddy hue, indicative of much exposure to the weather. He didn't look in the least like one obliged to cut down his activities, conserve his energies, and generally take care of himself. Felix couldn't possibly have guessed that the physician was worse off than his patient.

Seventeen miles they covered, passing through the intervening city, and necessarily slowing down for traffic. Even so it was uncanny the way the car slid along, diving through small spaces, slipping past one obstacle after another. It might have been a reckless boy at the wheel, Felix thought, and knew that but for his shaky nerves he should have enjoyed the exhibition of skilful driving.

No talk—almost no talk at all. That was the queerest thing! Now and then Burns made some

pleasant, curt observation about the country through which they were passing, but he seemed to make no attempt to get to know his patient; certainly he gave him not a word which could in the remotest sense be considered "professional." Felix was weary; he had slept little upon the train. In a way, he welcomed the silent drive. But Burns's reserve certainly did pique his languid curiosity. Only as they were entering upon the last mile of the quick trip did this extraordinary doctor make brief explanations.

"All I'm going to tell you about the Redfields is that their home is a place I'd like to stay in myself for almost any indefinite period. I'm going to leave you at their door and run back home for my own dinner. Some day I'll come out and we'll see how you like it. Meanwhile——"

He turned and glanced at Felix, who stared back at him. Then the Doctor burst into a hearty laugh.

"Expecting a prescription?" he questioned. "Not one. Do exactly as you please."

Felix Rowe's amazement was complete. "You don't expect me to take that literally?"

"Literally—within your own limitations.'

"You don't care what I eat—or don't eat?"

"Not a hang."

"Nor whether I—smoke?"

"That's up to your own judgment. You know whether you can smoke—and sleep."

"You're not going to give me any—orders?"

"Why should I? You have brains, I take it. At least you look as if you have. If you haven't, it's not I can supply them——"

"Do you expect me"—Felix considered it—"to be able to sleep to-night?"

"Don't know why not. Mrs. Redfield's beds look mighty comfortable to me."

"What if I don't?" His patient was being stung into asking for advice, somewhat to his own astonishment—he who was so weary of advice he had long wanted to run away from it.

"Lie awake. It doesn't matter."

"Doesn't matter?"

"Why, no! You're not going to die if you don't sleep, are you? If you are I won't leave you here: it would be a bother to Mrs. Redfield."

There was a full minute's silence. Then Felix said stiffly: "Excuse me for asking these questions, Doctor Burns. I supposed I was under your care."

"I supposed you were, too. If you want me to come in with you and put you to bed, feel your pulse and give you some medicine to take every hour, I can do it. But you look to me perfectly competent to put yourself to bed. This isn't a hospital I'm bringing you to. And as for the medicine, you've had enough of that, haven't you?"

"Why, yes—only——"

"Then suppose we make it along for a while without any. Taking medicine's a nuisance, from my point of view—keeps you watching the clock.—Well, here we are. Looks rather pleasant?"

It did look pleasant, the old house back among the trees. A mellow light glowed from all the downstairs windows and from the upper pair on the left of the front door—a sturdy door painted dark green with a knocker on it. Shrubbery grew high on either side of the door—lilac bushes, their leaves now half gone. A pair of collies came racing down the gravel path as the car stopped.

CHAPTER VI

FELIX ROWE followed Doctor Burns up the gravel path to the old house, the two collies who had rushed to meet them leaping nearly shoulder-high about them, and barking wildly.

"Yes, you're fine boys," declared Burns, addressing them, "but don't lose your heads—you may need 'em. I thought so—nobody needs to ring a doorbell with you to announce them."

As the door opened Felix was thinking with a good deal of curiosity of the Mrs. Redfield whom Burns had several times mentioned, and who, it seemed to him, was likely to be the person with whom he was to have most to do. He thought he knew what she would be like, and he dreaded her. A matronly woman, undoubtedly, who would want to be very kind. She would try to "be a mother" to him. Well, he'd have to let her see he didn't want any "mothering"—the Lord knew he'd had enough of anxious questions as to how he was feeling—which was his conception of being mothered. Still, judging by Doctor Burns himself, she might not be that sort, either. Perhaps she'd be more of a nurse. That was it—he had it now—that was why Burns

wasn't giving him any orders. The orders had already been given to the nurse. It was she who would take him in charge, and report back over the telephone to the Doctor. Very clever of Burns to make him think he was on his own, and then turn him over to somebody who would lay down schedules for him—measure out what he was to eat and drink—take his cigarettes away——

The door opened. A tall, thin man stood in the doorway; black spectacles stood out owlishly from a face which was more pallid than Felix's. For an instant the new arrival recoiled from the sight of one who was evidently not in health. But the sound of the voice speaking surprised him, it was so firm and clear.

"That you, Red? Mr. Rowe with you? Come in—come in. How do you do, Mr. Rowe? You're very welcome."

And Felix, putting his hand into the thin one outstretched, found it taken in a hearty grasp, which felt like that of a strong man.

"Can't stay, thank you, Linc. This is Felix Rowe —you have him by the hand. Mr. Lincoln Redfield, Rowe. I'm presenting you to him as your host. You'll find him a host of parts. Ah, here's Marcia— Mrs. Redfield, this is Mr. Rowe."

She had come into the hall, following her husband, and the light from the lamp on a table near the door

fell full on her face. Felix Rowe gazed at her with a most extraordinary impression of being in the presence of somebody the like of whom he had met only in places far from such as this. Certainly he had not expected to see her here—this—this—lady of quality. Why, yes, he knew where he had met her—in a receiving line somewhere—at a college commencement—at a garden party for officers in France—on a committee of prominent women called for some big cause—some place like that. Not in a country farmhouse, or what had been a farmhouse. Such women weren't found in such places; it wasn't possible.

She had given him her hand, her steady, clear eyes looked straight into his. "How do you do, Mr. Rowe. We're very glad to see you."

Many times before in his life had Felix Rowe noted that fewer words even than these can unerringly indicate the type of person whom one is meeting for the first time. The quality of the voice itself, the inflection, as well as the words spoken, tell the story. Lips may well hesitate before they form the betraying syllables, but lips seldom do. The truth is out: there's no disguising possible after that.

"You're an educated woman, anyhow," said Felix to himself. "Not that it matters. If you're educated, you probably can't cook."

But he replied like a mannerly young man, if a sick

one. Almost immediately she took him to his room. He expected her to suggest that he lie down at once, that she would bring him a tray. But she did nothing of the sort.

"We have supper in half an hour," she said. "Come down when you are ready." And left him to look about his quarters.

Well, again! What sort of room was this? It was a fairly large, square room, at the back corner of the square house, one window looking down the road, the other off toward distant hills, and nearer, down upon the October remnants of a garden, with ragged small yellow and white chrysanthemums fringing its borders. The impression of the room itself was of a clean, warm comfort. There were bookshelves; a round table with a student lamp; the woven rag rugs upon the brown-painted floor had bright streaks of red. On the old-fashioned bureau stood a copper bowl filled with scarlet salvia, reflecting itself vividly in the oval glass. And on the walls were photographs of—what?—ivied college quadrangles, a football team, a procession of dignitaries in hoods and gowns. Snapshots of gay young dogs pranking it in private quarters. A print of Abraham Lincoln —one of Theodore Roosevelt—one of Field-Marshal Foch—one of Eleanora Duse. Good heavens!— Was somebody posing? Of course! But here was a clever cartoon—a roistering, side-splitting, brilliant

thing, worth preserving. It was impossible not to remember how he himself had gloated over it when it came out in one of the New York dailies, just after the war. And here was a brown rotogravure cut from a Sunday edition, a group of pretty girls in theatrical costumes—the picture had been carefully clipped and pinned to the wall. Beauties—jolly!

"Wonder Mother didn't take that down, when she expurgated the room, after Sonny went back to school," Felix murmured. "Overlooked it. Everything else has a high moral tone, suited to the growing youth. Suited to me, too, I suppose. I'm to be exposed to all the virtues here, evidently. Suppose there's a Bible somewhere—that's all that's lacking."

He glanced about, in search of it. No? Nor a Biblical calendar? Not even a motto, surrounded with flowers, to lift up his soul? But he did come across something surprising printed on a card, and stuck in the corner of an old mirror between the windows.

> The second-rate is excellence—for the second rate.
>
> —JOUBERT.

That *was* revealing! He'd have to admit that a chap who would cut that out and pin it up where he could see it must have been doing some studying—and thinking. That wasn't a pose. If a fellow were trying to pose he wouldn't cut out *that* quiet stab,

he'd take something reverberating, like one of Kipling's Barrack Room Ballads.

Well—time to go downstairs? He'd rather go to bed, now he thought about it again. He was so desperately tired. Queer Mrs. Redfield couldn't see that. If ever he should have had supper on a tray it was to-night. Not that he wanted to be coddled like an invalid, but he certainly shouldn't be treated like a well man. Practically no sleep last night, a tiresome journey, a seventeen-mile drive with the car windows open in spite of his shivers—and now expected to come down and join the family circle. A blind man and a middle-aged woman—anybody else? Still, he rather wanted to see Mrs. Redfield again. There was something about her—there certainly was!

He went down heavily. There was a pleasant smell of cookery in the air—spicy. He felt almost hungry—not quite; hollow, more exactly expressed it. He found himself stumbling over the threshold, limp with sudden faintness—a sensation to which he was well accustomed.

Nobody took any notice of his weakness. Mrs. Redfield invited him out into the dining-room, where he had to continue to stand long enough to be introduced to a bright-eyed old man who told him at once that he was very deaf. The middle-aged blind man sat opposite the deaf old one, and Felix was

placed opposite Mrs. Redfield. This appeared to constitute the family circle, at present, anyhow. What a place for a sick young man!

Yet—there was Mrs. Redfield. As he looked across at her, Felix had to admit that her being there was going to make a difference. You couldn't say there was nobody there for him if she was there. He had seen a whole room in an art gallery given up to one picture—nothing else was needed. But—blindness and deafness—they were in the room with the picture—they would spoil it. Would they?

Meanwhile, there was a cup of bouillon before him, hot and clear and strong; little crisp fingers of toast to eat with it, also hot. The cup and saucer were of old blue-and-white. There was a bowl of orange and flame coloured nasturtiums in the centre of the table. Felix drank his bouillon and felt a little relief from the hollow faintness. Then came a plate of hash—corned-beef hash, browned all over the top, and a long, slim green pickle served on the plate with it. Invalid diet? It didn't look like it. Later came a hot red baked apple with its centre filled with raisins, cream poured over the whole. Delicious! Evidently the educated woman could cook, or tell somebody else how. Yet there seemed to be nobody else. She rose from the table and brought these things in herself, and there was no clatter of dishes from the kitchen, nor talking.

As for talking at the table, there wasn't more than he could bear of that. But what there was had a flavour, a certain unexpected quality. The blind man made some observations on current events, and his wife replied to them. The deaf man said a word or two now and then which had a touch of humour in it. They didn't bother Felix with questions, but he felt himself politely included. He didn't have much to say; he was too tired. He didn't intend to begin by bearing a part in the conversation at table; it was too much bother, and he meant to let them understand that he was a silent chap, anyhow. He'd talk when he felt like it, and when he didn't he was to be let alone.

The one thing he wanted, when supper was over, was to go to bed. Nobody interfered with that. He went up to his room and unpacked his bag. He expected somebody to come up, preferably Mrs. Redfield, to see if he was comfortable—if he had everything he wanted. She didn't. But in the bathroom, which he had been shown was next his own room opening from the hall, he found bath-towels hung over the corner of the tub.—That bath-room! There was something about it which caught his fancy. It had the cheapest sort of fixtures, a painted gray floor with a blue rag rug on it, an old bureau painted a light gray, there were racks of clean towels. It had a freshness, a nicety, a sugges-

tion of habitual cleanliness for everybody, which attracted him. At home the bathrooms weren't kept quite neat; garments were left in them; the maid was careless about scrubbing the costly porcelain tub—Felix detested oversights like these. This clean, scrupulously fresh room, with its fragrance of soap and outer air, made him want his bath instantly in the painted tin tub.

After the bath he got into his bed. The sheets were cotton, the blankets were cotton, the mattress was probably cotton, too. But the whole effect was of comfort. He waited a little, still expectant of a visitor to ask him if he wanted any further attention. While he was waiting he fell asleep.

CHAPTER VII

FROM Marcia Redfield to her daughter, Ruth Rust Redfield, at college:

DEAREST RUSTY:

Something interesting and quite new to tell you this week. We have a boarder; he came last evening. No, not the summer kind, a winter boarder, —what I might call a wintry boarder. A patient of Cousin Red's, whom that great surgeon friend of his, Doctor Leaver of Baltimore, has sent him. Felix Rowe was a war correspondent in France, and "crashed" during a battle—up in the air against orders. He has had a bad time of it since. Although he is, physically, fairly himself again, except for persistent weakness and languor, he is able to do no work at his desk. I believe he had a "column" on a great daily; and did much general writing besides—magazine articles, reviews, and so on. The trouble with him now is more or less obscure—a sort of mental hurdle he can't seem to take back into life and activity. He's a slim pale shadow, with a moody look; very silent and sober. He is apparently about thirty years old —possibly younger; such conditions age men early.

Cousin Red has a notion that living with us for a time may be good for him. He's not to be pampered —we shouldn't have much time for that, should we? He's to be treated normally, and left to absorb something or other which Red thinks we have here, to which Felix hasn't been accustomed. What do you think it is, Rusty? And have we it?

In any case, we are much interested to see what happens. We shall hold to our present course, and Felix may see as much or as little of our enterprises as he desires. Our Boys' Club members will tramp up and downstairs past his door—I've given him Nick's room for the present—and they'll thump lustily over his head when their affairs grow lively in their attic quarters. But we shall change nothing on his account. We don't intend to force any therapeutic measures upon him, nor even consider him much. But if Red is right, Felix will experience some quite new reactions, which may kill or cure him.

Thank you for the books, dear. A Russian novelist, an English essayist, and an American statesman-biographer—what richness for one package! And what did you deny yourself in order to afford them for us? Your father has fingered them over and over, gloating over the thickness of them; and has arranged them on the table under the lamp waiting for me to begin to read them aloud—which I shall do this evening. Grandfather insists that he

can read only newspapers as they should be read—that seems to be oddly true. I'm waiting for the moment to come when he and Felix fall naturally to talking of newspapers. I want him to know Andy Carter, too, in good time. Andy's office might contain some pretty efficient stimulus to his interest. But I shall not precipitate it. I have an idea that the patient is going to be very suspicious of "remedial" suggestions, and I intend to disappoint him—for his good! This isn't much of a letter, but it's all I have time for this morning. I shall send on the freshened party frock to-morrow, in plenty of time for the Senior spread. No, I didn't sit up nights to do it—put in a stitch at a time. I think you'll like the little yellow silk rosebud wreath about the shoulders—I'm quite proud of that. You'll look like a Rusty-peach in it!

Now I must run and make the Brown Betty for dessert. Heaps of candied overflow round the edges—m-m-m—don't you wish you could have some?

Blessings on you, Rusty,

MOTHER.

In reply to this came back by return mail a letter in a boyishly heavy hand, the ink very black, the dashes very determined:

Good gracious, Mother darlin'—what a shock! A wintry boarder—I'll wager he *is* that! Of course you may have much more than enough to do with-

out taking him. But I'll admit I'd do almost anything myself Cousin Red wanted. The man has a way wid him!

So this Felix has a "mental hurdle" to get over, has he? Well, if anything can get him over it, it will be association with you. Yes, I should think Andy Carter might be very good for him indeed. To see you taking hurdles of every sort ought to put anybody to shame. But there never was anybody like you—never will be. You oughtn't to be cooped up there in the country, of course; yet when I come home and see you doing things—the kind of things you do—I wonder if anybody could possibly be of any more use. But you need some fun, Mother, once in a while—you do! A regular blow-off. Nick and I were talking about it last summer. We're going to see that you get it. So don't plan to keep your boarder right up till the time the summer lot come. Mind that, now.

You may be interested to know that I lost my temper yesterday more completely than I've done for a long time, carried along by the force of the concussion. I'm not proud of it—no, not a bit. As a result seven girls hate me—for life, I think. I don't much blame 'em. The worst of it is I made a bad impression on at least one person I wanted to make a good one on, and fear I can't live it down. What's the matter with red hair, anyhow? Does it strike in

and affect the brain? Not that it's any excuse, of course.

You were a brick to fix up the frock for me. It looks as if it were right out of a very nice and exclusive establishment. The wreath is an achievement. How do you bring your wonderful brains down to low speed like that?

Bye—heaps of love.

Your

RUSTY.

P. S. Tell Andy Carter I've written him a terribly impertinent letter and shall send it when I can work out an ending that shall be the tassel on the cap!

R. R. R.

CHAPTER VIII

THERE was nothing to do in this place—nothing to do. Felix had been here five days now, and not a thing had happened to interest him. These people went along, occupied with their own affairs; they paid him no special attention, beyond that which they might be expected to pay any well boarder. They seemed to think him perfectly able to look after himself. Oh, they were pleasant enough, and he rather enjoyed sitting at table with them, for the conversation was more or less entertaining, though he didn't bother himself to bear much part in it. After the meal was over Mrs. Redfield disappeared into her kitchen for a time, and was afterward to be discerned only here and there, always and ceaselessly busy. She went out and came in, usually bearing a small basket, or with books tucked under her arm. If Felix met her in the hall or anywhere, she gave him a word and a smile, but that was all.

As for the blind man, Felix didn't know what he did with the endless time upon his hands. Once he was observable through the half-open kitchen door, wiping dishes very slowly and carefully, out of the

steaming pan in which his wife was stacking them. At other times he was to be seen making his way about the house; once he was heard picking out a tune with one finger upon the piano. And the old, deaf man was always reading, slowly and stumblingly, for his eyes were none too good for very fine print. Sometimes he was heard reading aloud to the blind man. People from outside came and went; clubs met here; boys racketed up and downstairs. Everybody was occupied except Felix.

"How long am I to be expected to stand this?" thought Felix, communing unhappily with himself. "And when is that doctor going to look me up? How the devil am I to get through the time?"

He didn't sleep as well the second night as he had the first. He had been so worn out that first night that he had slept from exhaustion, he supposed. The second night he wasn't worn out, except from the slow passing of the unoccupied hours. The third night he didn't sleep at all—or thought he didn't. Not much, anyhow.

On the morning of the fourth day he remained in bed. When he didn't appear at the breakfast table, the meal being nearly over, Mrs. Redfield came up. Felix had thought that course of procedure would bring her.

"Come in," he said, in a feeble voice, when she rapped.

She came in, and stood at the foot of his bed, surveying him.

"Anything especially the matter, Mr. Rowe?" she asked. "Or did you just feel like staying in bed? Shall I bring you up a tray?"

Felix didn't lift his eyes to her. Her tone had been pleasant, but the way the questions were put seemed to him rather unfeeling.

"I haven't slept for two nights," he said.

"Haven't you? I should hardly have thought you would."

"You knew I've been suffering from insomnia?"

She nodded. "It's written all over you. It doesn't seem necessary that you should suffer from insomnia. Nobody can sleep who hasn't used a muscle all day, either of body or mind, you know."

Felix looked at her. "I suppose my not having a particle of strength to use makes no difference."

"Not a particle? You couldn't walk across the floor this morning?"

Felix was suddenly terribly irritated. What sort of hostess was this, to treat him so cavalierly? Wasn't he ill—desperately ill, so that he was the patient of a great specialist, and had been sent here to be placed under the care of another physician—one who hadn't even bothered to call upon him, or to lay out any course of treatment? And here was Mrs. Redfield, who was—he supposed she was—being paid to

look after him, talking to him as if she thought him shamming his weakness and weariness. He had liked her thus far; she was an interesting person; but he didn't like a bit this attitude of indifference to his ills. He had wanted to be left alone, to be sure, having been fussed over till he was frantic; but there was a limit to the wish to be left alone—a fellow didn't expect to be treated as if he were a fool or a malingerer.

"I presume I could," he replied very stiffly. "So please don't bother about me. By and by I'll crawl out into the orchard and pick up an apple."

There was silence, while she continued to regard him. Although he didn't again look up at her, he found himself wishing he knew what was the expression on her face. He rather regretted that he'd said exactly that; it sounded small-boyish, in the retrospect. But he wouldn't speak again till she did. When she did speak, her tone was gentle.

"I'll bring you up a tray," she said.

Then he looked up, for she was moving toward the door.

"You probably think I'm a baby," he mumbled, as angry with himself as with her, but imagining he was angry only with her.

She smiled then, and her smile was a delightful thing to see; it warmed him a little.

"If I think you're a baby," she said, "I think also

you've been made so. You wouldn't naturally be a baby. If I were you, I wouldn't go on being one."

Then she went out and quietly closed the door.

Well!—that certainly did sting! He sat up in bed, as he might if a bee had suddenly run a stiletto into him. Almost immediately he arose and hurriedly dressed, his fingers trembling. If only he could get downstairs before she appeared with that tray! But he didn't quite make it. He met her in the doorway as he opened it.

Her lifted eyebrows were quizzical, and he felt like an idiot. But he wouldn't offer to go downstairs and discount the trouble he had made her. He silently took the tray from her, his thin cheeks showing a streak of red, and crossed the room with it to the table.

"I think you'll find everything there," she said, a peculiar rich vibration in her voice, as if she were amused over the whole little affair. And went away again.

Felix ate his breakfast without much enjoying it, though it was a delicious breakfast, and the tray beautifully arranged, just as if she had wanted to please him—or to shame him. All it lacked had been a flower on his napkin. He thought her quite capable of having added that, if it had occurred to her. If she had, he told himself, he would have thrown it out of the window.

When he had eaten, he carried the tray down to the kitchen. He didn't know exactly why he did this; he certainly hadn't been accustomed to carry his own trays around. He found himself able to walk more steadily than he had expected when he had decided to remain in bed. The kitchen was empty; clean and shining as hands could make it. He set the tray on the table, and couldn't help noting that its presence there marred the perfect order of the place. But of course there was nothing he could do about that.

Another day to get through! What could he do with it? Reading was the only suggestion his mind made to him. There was nothing here to read—nothing to his taste, which was highly developed. He hadn't ordered any of the great dailies sent to him; he ought to do that, if he remained much longer. The books in the sitting-room were exactly the sort of books such people would have—the selections of educated people, but—as he considered them—of narrow people. None of the names he would have put upon a list if he had been ordering books were there. Of course not. He knew he might send for such books himself—but—that was just it. He hadn't the energy to send for them. That was the way his illness manifested itself. He couldn't summon interest enough in anything to turn his hand over. The mere thought of sitting down and writing

the brief note necessary to the ordering of a daily newspaper and a list of books seemed to build an actual barrier between himself and the accomplished fact. Rather go without them than do it.

The sunshine was bright outside—October sunshine in the country. Felix looked out at it and thought he'd like to sit in it—let it pour over and into him—soak himself in it. So by exercising a real effort he got into his light overcoat, pulled his hat down over his eyes, and walked weakly out upon the back porch, which was long and narrow and flooded with that sunlight. Here he sat down upon the railing, and gazed off over the orchard, feeling like a worm that had crawled out of a hole in the ground, and must soon crawl back into it. At least, that was the way he thought he felt.

CHAPTER IX

FROM Andrew Carter, Editor of *The Eastville Arrow*, to Ruth Rust Redfield, at college:

DEAR RUSTY:

Thanks for the bully article—"At the Back of the Audience." It took you to think up a theme like that. You certainly got them all, from the woman who pats her hair and takes a look around just as the speaker is warming up to his first big point, to the man who shifts his head just often enough to keep the people behind him shifting. You really made that audience almost more eloquent from the rear than it could have been from the front!—Our subscribers are reading your stuff, you know—eating it up. And every now and then, with your humour, you get in something that really searches them out and sets them thinking along new lines. Myself, too, if I must admit it.

You ask me about the new boarder—the wintry boarder—the adjective seems particularly well chosen. I haven't met him yet, but Shep has, and I have Shep's reactions to give you. When he came in this morning he gave me a report on the case,

as usual. He couldn't start any work on the job press till he'd freed his mind.

"Well, he's been at the Redfields' a week coming Saturday, Mr. Carter, and he's made about as much impression on the general landscape as a flyspeck on that sheet of printing paper. You know I carry up the wood and coal for all the stoves, mornings before breakfast. But not his. Have to do his nights, not to disturb his slumbers. There's one of those old Franklin box open-front stoves in his room, and she takes a lot of stoking—he keeps the drafts on her so she roars most of the time. Last night I dropped a whole armful of wood—by accident, of course,"—here Shep couldn't conceal his twinkling eye—"and I wish you could have seen him jump. I thought he'd hit the ceiling, sure. Then I certainly do wish you could have heard him bawl me out. He didn't swear at me only the first word; after that he was just deadly sarcastic. Wanted to know if I hadn't better bring in one stick at a time, so I'd be able to hang on to it. Said whenever he heard me coming along the hall he got ready for a bombardment. Asked if he could buy me a pair of boots that I could make still more noise with—he thought up in the lumberjack country they'd have 'em, and I'd enjoy the effect I could make with 'em. Asked me what my regular job was the rest of the day when I wasn't murderin' sleep. I told him I was on the

Arrow. 'On the *Arrow?*' said he. 'With your light touch you're the feathers on the head, I presume?' Then I got sort of mad," said Shep, "even though Mrs. Redfield had told me he was sick, and I ripped out that I ran the linotype and the presses, and that filling up wood-boxes was only what I did to pay for my room at the Redfields'. That any time I didn't suit him I presumed he could find some fairy-footed fellow to tip-toe in with the stuff for his stove, or at a pinch he could bring it up himself. At that he laughed in a grim sort of way and said he'd have to apologize for being so rude to a newspaper man, and asked me which editorials were mine in the last issue. Gee!" said Shep, "I could have picked him up and thrown him in the wood-box after the wood I'd dropped—he wouldn't fill it up much. What Mrs. Redfield wanted to take *him* in for!"

Evidently Shep is going to be one of the elements which may be effective in the wintry boarder's cure. I met your Grandfather Redfield a day or two ago, after this Rowe had been in your home two or three days, and asked him for his impression of the chap. He said, "He can be silenter in a given length of time than any young man I ever knew. His silence is so thick and heavy it reaches out 'way around him and infects us all." Well, if Shep has succeeded in shaking this dumb person into speech, even such speech as this I'm reporting, it may be a good thing.

I could tell him that Shep isn't a negligible quantity, by any means—he's the brightest boy I ever got hold of for a job like mine. If when he brings up the wood Rowe would engage him in real conversation, the cynic might find something to interest him instead of something to swear at and talk caustic English to. I'd like you to have heard the perfect mimicry of Shep's tone. I haven't met Rowe, to be sure, but I could recognize the type, easily enough—the rather supercilious drawl, and the evident enjoyment of making a supposed inferior feel like a dog. If Shep felt like a dog, though, it was like a big one who wants to take the little one by the scruff of the neck and shake him good and plenty.

Oh, well—I shouldn't try to prejudice you further against our hero. I'll admit Grandfather Redfield said generously that he supposed the young man had had a pretty bad time of it in the war, and that the family meant to be patient with him and give him time. He'll need a lot of time, though, by the signs. I'm sorry your mother has to have the care of him on her hands, though she'll be most awfully good for him. Your mother, you know, Rusty, is good for most people. You'll notice I didn't say "good *to* him." She's good for people in the way that mustard plasters and spring bitters and a stinging cold wind are good for them. And then, once in a while, when she thinks they need it, she becomes a glass of

wine, or a bunch of roses, or a sunny nook they can rest in.—Yes, I know what you'll say—that I'm a trifle maudlin over your mother. Why not? She's not like anybody else in the world.

But—you're her daughter, and every one of these things mentioned can, I think, be found in you.—What do I hear you say?—"That's enough on that line, Andy Carter." All right, my friend.

I'm sending you the proof of the article, though I think I could be trusted to see that not a comma is misplaced. If you want to add a closing paragraph I sha'n't object. The one which concludes it now isn't, to my mind, as strong as you could make it. Somebody told you it was time to go to a class, and you ended the thing just where you were at the moment. Mind this criticism? As ever,

ANDY.

In reply to this frank communication, Andrew Carter promptly received the following letter:

DEAR ANDY:

Of course I mind the criticism. That article ends exactly where I want it to. It stops when I'm through, without any closing "peroration." I'm returning it "as is," and if you don't want to print it that way you can fire it back. No, of course I'm not cross, Andy; I'm merely firm. And I'm terribly

edgy toward that boarder, and only wish Shep had dropped the wood on his feet. That boy's worth two of the man. I've been glad ever since you took him into the office, and know you'll really make something of him.

Yes, my mother's one out of a thousand—I'll agree with you there. But I don't agree with anything you say after you finish raving over her. I'm a hornet's nest, an east wind, a scratchy cat, and I realize it more every day. You're—what are you, Andy Carter? Well, I think you're a little sentimental, in spots. No, don't smash anything. I know you think you're a hard-headed owner and editor of a paper that can fight like a bull-dog—and so it can. But when it comes to eulogizing some old soak after he dies just because his weeping family wants you to, I think you go a bit far, and "softness" isn't too bad a word to use. So—now we're quits!

"Mind this criticism?" Not you!

As ever,

Rusty.

CHAPTER X

I SUPPOSE," said Red Pepper Burns, irritably, one morning at breakfast, "I ought to go and look up that chap Rowe at the Redfields'. He's been there nearly a week, confound him. Marcia reports he isn't sleeping. Of course he only thinks he isn't."

Now, admittedly, this was no spirit in which a physician should go to visit a patient, particularly a "nervous" patient. But the truth of the matter was that Doctor Burns himself had not slept the night before. Contrary to orders—the orders of his good friend Buller, who had long ago forbidden Red to do any night work—he had done a particularly hard job of it. Somehow or other, in spite of the fact that the telephone at Red's bedside had a cut-off upon it, which Ellen his wife now habitually put into effect, the cut-off hadn't worked—hadn't been quite off, evidently—and a call had come through. Ellen hadn't heard it—Red had, and had answered it. It was an appeal he couldn't refuse—an old patient who wanted him so desperately that Red instantly and warmly answered that he'd come. He had risen and dressed and stolen out of the house, and had remained all night at that bedside of his old friend.

It had been a hard fight, but the Doctor had won—temporarily. He had subdued the rending pain it hurt him keenly to see, and had taken measures to prevent its immediate return. But the end wasn't far away—it was a matter of days, probably. Red had come away in the dawn carrying a sense of personal bereavement—and carrying something else, which was harder still to bear. Bearing it was such an old story. He was worn out bearing it. He wanted to work—to work as he had done in the old days. He hadn't spent a whole night like this since the blow had fallen three years ago, in war-time. He hadn't forgotten how it felt to fight like that for a human life—there was something about it which had always roused the best and strongest there was in him.

Consultation practice didn't bring a man that experience, exactly. The consultant was called in in the daytime, usually; it was the other man, the physician in charge, who did the fighting, who was summoned to the bedside in the middle of the night, and who knew the rigours of the responsibility. As has been said, Red had been forbidden this first-hand contact with the actual practical demands of the case. But that was what he had liked—that first-hand contact—when with coat off and sleeves rolled up (not always literally, but figuratively, anyhow) he sat beside the bed and did the work

himself, with a nurse at his elbow. And let the consultant, if there had been one (which there hadn't often, in Red's cases, because he hated them), go hang. Patients had usually passed the crisis—when he took them past.

When he drove out to see Felix Rowe he was experiencing the reaction from his sleepless and anxious night. In days past, accustomed to loss of sleep as he was accustomed to food itself, he had known no such reactions; or if he had, had been much too busy and absorbed in his work to have them affect him. Dog tired he had been, a million times, of course; and depressed, because he couldn't always pull his patient through, in a world of mortality; but never then had he felt as he did now. Superannuated—that was the word in his mind, as it had been many times before; superannuated, done for, at an age when he should have been at the full zenith of his powers to labour. Would he ever get used to that? Would being considered the best man in the whole locality to sit in judgment on a case, admired and deferred to by everybody, ever compensate him for being the man with his shirt-sleeves rolled up, his brow wet with the struggle? Never! That's all there was of that, and no matter how long he had to live out this take-care-of-himself existence (he hoped it wouldn't last too many years), he would never settle into his chimney corner, and be pleased with it.

So it wasn't in the sunniest mood in the world that he remembered that it really was time he looked up Jack Leaver's patient, the let-alone policy he had determined on with Felix Rowe for the first few days having gone on long enough for him to be able to decide upon its effect. He drove out to the Redfields' with his upper lip between his teeth, biting back his own ill temper. Red had always had a temper—it went with his hair; he hadn't yet overcome it, and probably never would. Nothing in these days roused it more quickly than a suggestion that he was overdoing. And Ellen, who was as nearly perfect in discretion as a wife could be, had said, indiscreetly, when he came in at dawn from the bedside of his old friend, "Oh, Red, did you *have* to go?"

"I did. And I'd have gone if I'd known I'd come back on a stretcher," he had answered grimly. He was still nursing that grievance. When the thing was done, why reproach him? If she hadn't, he could have gloated over that night just past. As it was, he had to admit that his worn-out heart was tired this morning, and was acting badly. He hadn't admitted it to her. On the contrary. Not that he cared. Only—it was a bother. And it wasn't at all the time for him to deal with a nervous patient. He knew that. But that was why he went—couldn't keep still.

He came in through the house, and was told by

Father Redfield—everybody called Lincoln Redfield's father that—that the boarder was out on the back porch.

"How do you all get on with him?" Red shouted in the old man's ear.

Mr. Redfield smiled—it was a shrewd smile. If his ears were deaf and his eyesight poor, he was still keenly sensitive to impressions and his judgments were worth having.

"He thinks," he said, "he's in a hard case. So he is—so he is. It's always a hard case when a man is more sorry for himself than for anybody else. But—give him time. Behind that mask he tries to wear should be a real man. We'll find him, Red."

Red grunted. "We'll see. He hasn't lifted his finger, I suppose."

"I think not. Yes—yes, he has. I saw him carrying a breakfast tray out to the kitchen this morning."

"Remarkable! You say he's on the back porch. I'll look him up—not that I want to."

"No. He's not the sort of case to interest you, Red," remarked the old man. "But he's the sort of case you can handle, I should say, if anybody."

"I'm not so sure."

Red strode through the kitchen, out upon the porch. There sat the tall figure—sprawled, rather, upon the rail. Felix's head rested against the slim column, as if he couldn't hold it up without support. His

attitude was more like that of a dead man, propped there, than of a live one. His bare hand, resting on his knee in the sunshine, was the colour of paste.

"Life not worth living, I suppose?" was Red's greeting. He managed not to snap it out, though he felt like it. He knew perfectly that he shouldn't have come to-day. The sight of that figure irritated him intensely. Even nerves needn't make a chap lie down, he thought.

Felix started at the sound of the unexpected voice, glanced at the Doctor, and answered by a shake of the head.

"Well, it's got to be lived, just the same, hasn't it?" went on the Doctor, curtly. "And this is a pretty decent morning to do it in. Suppose you and I walk down in that orchard there and talk things over."

Felix got up languidly. There was something about this man's way of making a suggestion which didn't brook a negative. The patient didn't want to be ordered out to walk, but an order it seemed to be. Side by side the two paced slowly and silently along over the grass, past rows of fall anemones and little yellow button chrysanthemums, till they reached the gnarled trees under which lay piles of bright red apples. A ladder stood against one of the trees. Red pulled it down to a milder angle, and waved Felix toward it.

"If you want to sit down," he said, "you can make yourself some sort of a seat on that. I suppose you do want to sit down?"

"Thanks. I can stand," Felix answered, stiffly.

"Glad to hear it. Sit down just the same." Red stifled a desire to bunt against the slim, stooping figure and make it fall. An unreasonable and unbecoming desire, from physician toward patient, he knew. But within his own breast he could feel a heart which wasn't compensating comfortably this morning because of the night's fatigue, and knew that Felix Rowe had nothing like that to handicap him. If it came to a race down the orchard he himself would be likely to topple over before Felix did. . . . Oh, well—never mind—life to him was probably a sweeter thing than it was to Felix, even under all his disabilities. Let him be generous to this young man, who had so much to learn.

Felix sat down on the ladder rungs. Red leaned against a tree opposite him. "Now—suppose we have it out," he said. "All out, down to the last shred of evidence."

"Evidence—of what?"

"That you can't go on, like other chaps. You've got to prove that to me, you see. And I'll tell you at the start, it'll have to be mighty strong evidence. Go ahead. Plead your own case."

Felix moistened his dry lips. For a long minute he

was silent. When he spoke it was in a curious tone of defiance. "I've no case to plead," he said. "I'm simply—not interested to go on living. But—if I have any principles, it's one of them that there's no way out I can take, if I can help taking the one I'd like. . . . That's all, I think."

"That's all, is it? Nothing more you want to say? No symptoms you want to give me? Except that one—that you're not interested to go on living? And the counter declaration—that in spite of that you don't intend to cut it short, if you can help it. That's all? Think carefully—because we're not going back over this ground."

Felix looked at his physician. He encountered in return a cool, appraising look which he might have considered hard but for one thing, and he couldn't just analyse that. There was a curious little quiver at one corner of Red's mouth. It was caused by Red's heart—his physical heart, which at the moment was bothering him rather badly. But to Felix it meant that the man was trying him rather than condemning him; perhaps that he was really interested to try him before he condemned. Of course this was the truth—and yet Felix had had the conviction all along that his sort of case was one for contempt; that all doctors, even specialists, had no use for the man who couldn't get himself in hand; that they didn't really put much consideration, much

time, on such cases, but got rid of them as soon as possible by turning them over to somebody else. And that, first, last, and all the time, they despised their patients—didn't believe they'd ever had any force of character, or they wouldn't have let go in the first place. But this man, Doctor Burns, somehow, in spite of his brusque manner (to which, by this time, Felix was used enough in the profession) seemed different from the rest—interestingly different. To put it concisely, Felix found himself becoming a little interested in his physician himself. He was rather surprised to realize that he wanted to answer that last question in a way that the Doctor would respect.

"There's one more thing, I suppose," he said. "I told you I wasn't interested to go on living. I don't think that's exactly a pose. I'm not. But I'm not beyond wishing I were interested. I don't want to sink like a stone. If I've got to go to the bottom I'd rather it would be with a splash."

And now he saw something happen. He saw his physician's expression alter, light; saw the cool, appraising look change to warmth. Suddenly Red laughed—the laugh of a man immensely pleased by something.

"Rowe," he said, "I like that, because it's honest. The other wasn't. We've got something to go on. You wish you were interested. By George, you're

going to be. And here's my prescription. Go into the house, and find the book Lincoln Redfield would like to have read to him, and read it to him, in your best style, for half an hour."

Felix frowned. "Oh, now you're going to try that altruistic stuff," he complained. "The Golden Rule and so forth. Be 'helpful' and you'll be happy. Doctor Burns, if you knew me you wouldn't expect to get at me that way. You can't do it."

Burns gazed back at him. "I see," he said, quickly, fire in his eye. "That was a mistake—a technical error. All right—I take it back. Go into the house and up to your room and let the blind man go hang. Let the old deaf one look after himself. Let Mrs. Redfield—the latchet of whose shoes you and I are not worthy to unloose—carry up trays to you, because you're too damned lazy to get up and come down to breakfast. Welter in your selfishness, exactly as you've been doing, and see where it gets you. Have you written to your family since you got here? I'll swear you haven't. You haven't done a thing but nurse your sorrows. No wonder you're sick of life, man."

Felix stared at him. What kind of a red-head was this? Burns had pulled off his hat to run his hand through his hair—the thickest red hair sprinkled with gray Felix had ever seen. A touch-and-go temper had this doctor; didn't mind speaking the plain truth,

either. Felix was angry, of course—yet once more he was interested. The anger made him stiffen; the interest woke him up. The result was red in his cheek again.

"You don't mind what you say, do you, Doctor Burns?" he said in his most disdainful manner. He was suddenly standing straight as a ramrod.

"You bet I don't. But that'll be all for to-day. I'm going. Sometime we'll try it again, maybe. I'm not in the mood to-day to tackle your case, for a fact. I'm probably not the man for it, anyway. You see,"—he glared at Felix now—"there are so many people in the world who have got something really the matter with them, it's hard to bother with the ones who only think they have. If you really weren't suffering with a case of unbounded egoism as your chief disability, you'd be touched by the sight of those two men in the house, who are about the biggest kind of uncomplaining trumps I know of. The way you took my suggestion throws a brighter light on your difficulty than anything you could have told me in a month. Good morning, Mr. Rowe."

And R. P. Burns marched away through the orchard, boiling with wrath which he knew perfectly was more or less unreasonable, but which he couldn't for the moment control. Later, on his way home when he had cooled, he said to himself, chuckling, that though his really unpardonable rudeness was an

heroic dose of medicine for his patient, more than likely it was what the fellow most needed, after all. As for Felix, watching him go, he was fiercely conscious that he wanted to live for a while longer, anyhow, if only to get even with that red-headed volcano. He hadn't met so challenging a man in a year!

CHAPTER XI

"OH, RUSTY, aren't you *ever* going to bed?"

"In due course, my child, in due course."

"Due course! It's"—Henrietta raised herself on her elbow, her fair hair falling all about her bare shoulders, and peered at the big nickel alarm clock on the bookshelf—"it's half-past twelve! It's wicked, Rus, it's simply *wicked*, to sit up like this—making Christmas presents, of all things—after an awful day like yesterday. And I can't sleep with the light in my eyes," she added, in the same drowsy tone of complaint.

"Well, if you haven't been sleeping, Infant, you've been giving a mighty close imitation of it," Rusty pointed out. Her fingers did not cease to fly along the edges of the small rose-silk lampshade she was making expertly. Her copper-coloured hair gleamed startlingly as she bent her head over her work and thus brought the electric rays by which she was working to bear upon it. She shifted small slippered feet composedly, settling herself afresh. "And the light's not in your eyes. I propped that magazine up in front of it on purpose to keep it out."

"And you're trying to study, too." Henrietta's

blue gaze had fallen upon the textbook spread open on Rusty's lap, beneath the drooping edges of the silk. "I tell you it's wicked!"

"Your ideas of crime and mine differ, Henny Penny. I'm going to get these bits of gifts done if I never go to bed between now and Christmas. And I can tuck away a whole row of French verbs while I'm sewing, and never notice it. Turn over and go to sleep again, and don't bother me."

"I wish I had a glass of milk," the girl in the bed murmured, her tone changing to coaxing. "I never can go back to sleep without it."

"Nothing doing." Rusty didn't stir. "You had your share to-day, and mine's set for cream for breakfast."

"I'll go without coffee for breakfast."

"Yes, you will—not! Stop talking to me."

Henrietta sighed, but turned over, and in two minutes her breathing proved that she had had no difficulty in returning to slumber. Rusty went on sewing for another half hour. Then she put her work away, took a final survey of the long list of verbs, verifying the fact that they were now safely stowed away in her memory, and stood up, stretching weary arms.

Late as it was, however, she turned on her bath and took a swift plunge, her copper curly locks pinned on the top of her head. Then, an adorable figure in her

plain little nightgown, her bare round arms folded beneath her head, she followed her room-mate swiftly into the land of dreams. But not before she had said her prayers. This was Rusty's one-o'clock-in-the-morning prayer:

"Dear Lord, take care of all the perfectly splendid people at home—particularly Mother—and particularly Dad. Keep Nick and Jerry and Jinny safe from all the things that might really hurt them. Forgive me for losing my temper to-day—I'm sorry. And please forgive me for not saying much of a prayer to-night, because I'm sort of tired. Bless Henrietta—she needs it. And if You *can* remove that no-count wintry boarder from our home before we come for Christmas, please do. I'm grateful for all the wonderful things You do for us—indeed I am. I guess that's all. For Christ's sake, Amen—— Oh, I forgot to pray for ten million people who need Your care worse than I do—forgive me for that, but I'm *so* sleepy. And *that's* all!"

Which sounds, in the report, like a child's prayer, but it must be distinctly stated that Ruth Rust Redfield was no child. She had gone to college later than most girls do—twenty years old—but not because of any lack of brains. The money had to be found first—a good deal of it earned; and now, in her senior year, she was earning steadily still. There wasn't much of anything Rusty couldn't turn

her hand to. As for her will—it was much bigger than her body.

In spite of her late hour of retiring, she was up in the morning at six. At seven she shook Henrietta's shoulder. The two slept on cots on opposite sides of their one room. Henrietta did not have to earn any money; she had just enough supplied her from home on which to live frugally. She chose to live with Rusty because—well—there were many girls in college who would have been only too glad to share Rusty Redfield's simple quarters for the delight of being with her. The fact that she didn't pamper Henrietta made her none the less attractive to her.

"Get up, lazy Infant, and hustle, too. The coffee's ready, and I'm making the toast. I'm putting your egg on—four minutes. You can dress in four, if you try."

"I can't."

A vigorous hand pulled the bedclothes off Henrietta's cot, exposing her to the chilly air of a room whose two windows had been wide open all night and which hadn't yet had a chance to grow really warm.

"You horrid thing!" Henrietta was being coerced into a sitting position. "Oh, Rusty, don't you ever, *ever* lie in bed, no matter how tired you are?"

"Never. Life's too short. Look at that shade, Henny; isn't it pretty? Finished it last night, spite

of your silly outcries. I found the lamp yesterday—got it cheap because it had a crack in the wood—I can enamel it over. Won't my mother enjoy that by her bedside?"

"Yes, it's awfully pretty," yawned Henrietta, lifting long, slender arms, as she stood shivering beside the radiator. She was as tall and slight as Rusty was small and sturdy—a willowy reed of a girl with an attractive face. Henrietta had her good points, or Rusty wouldn't have brooked her as a room-mate. Rusty, though generous to a fault, hadn't time to train a chum from the ground up, and she had chosen Henrietta from among a number of eager candidates because she honestly liked her. Of course the Infant had her faults—so had Rusty; that must be frankly admitted. But on the whole the two got on amazingly well.

"What do you think?" Rusty was through her breakfast before the other girl had sat down to hers, and was swiftly rinsing and drying her own cup and spoon and plate at a boiling hot faucet in the tiny closet which served as a kitchenette. The "apartment" was one of those microscopic ones in the region of a great city's university; its one really redeeming feature its possession of two front windows looking off over the campus. For the sake of this advantage the two tenants had agreed to sacrifice space. Both were country girls, accustomed to a wide outlook;

neither could face brick walls and keep up courage for her work.

"I don't think. Hurry up and tell me." Henrietta poured her coffee into a cup which held a liberal supply of cream, realizing that as usual Rusty had given her the lion's share, and inwardly resolving that to-morrow morning she would get up in time to apportion the cream herself. Each morning she had made this vow, the next to break it.

"Lee Brainard wants to go home with me for the Holidays. Actually begs the privilege. What do you think of that!"

"Goodness! Kentucky Lee! Shall you take her?"

"We-ll—I don't want to, of course. But she wants it so badly I'm almost forced to do it. She puts it as a personal favour. The whole thing is funny, really. Did you ever know anybody to beg an invitation like that from a classmate who isn't at all a special friend? Of course I know she'll try to pay me back by making me some gorgeous present, which I sha'n't be able to refuse because she'll be so sweet about it."

"Everybody knows she has a frightful crush on you," mused Henrietta.

Rusty wheeled, frowning. "No! That's never shown at all. I don't believe it. If I did, I wouldn't take her."

"She is, honestly, very lonely," Henrietta went on.

"And as for the crush on you, forty other girls have one, too, only you won't notice 'em. Lee Brainard's pretty beguiling. And what's the harm of having a friend with money? I wish she wanted to go home with me!"

"Infant, I'm ashamed of you. Of course you don't mean it. Well, I'm virtually committed to taking her. She puts it in the most delicate way. She knows we have boarders all summer—I suppose that makes it seem to her more possible to ask the invitation. But of course she didn't mention that. Just told me there was nobody in her old Kentucky home she cared for except a coloured Mammy, and that she wanted to spend Christmas in a real home with no ghosts in it. She could have any number of invitations, we know. Dozens of girls would be delighted to ask her if they had any idea she wanted to be asked."

"She doesn't—except by you," Henrietta put in. "Well, just so you don't return the crush——" She glanced at Rusty, smiling.

"Good old scout!" Rusty had pulled on a loose rough gray coat, a little shabby about the sleeves but still becoming, and had seized an armful of books and notebooks. "Your position is secure, and you know it. Bye—till to-night. I shall lunch at a fruit stand. You'll put the macaroni on at four, won't you?"

"Sure thing. Which kind of buns do you want?"

"None, thank you. I'll toast the heel of that loaf. Buy what you like for yourself."

"You're getting absolutely parsimonious," growled Henrietta, affectionately.

"If one isn't parsimonious before Christmas one can't be munificent when it arrives," called back Rusty, as she closed the door.

"That girl," Henrietta reflected, making ready to follow her, "is positively starving herself to be able to give her family those lampshades and things. I believe she's five pounds lighter than when she came back in September. I shall buy cream puffs and surprise her; she does love 'em."

CHAPTER XII

TWO days later, it being the Wednesday before Christmas, which fell this year on Sunday, Henrietta watched Rusty pack for the short journey, and admitted that never had she seen more joyous content over a selection of gifts. For herself, she was always allowed a reasonable sum extra in her December remittance from home with which to make her Christmas purchases, which she had done in a rush. Something for everybody, selected without much previous thought, was her method, and a sigh of relief breathed when it was over. But Rusty! The lampshade, carefully packed in pasteboard, with the small standard, now enamelled a shining black, wrapped and tied and rolled in a petticoat for safety. The petticoat itself made exquisitely by hand, out of a remnant of white silk—this was for Jinny, her sister explained. For Nick there was a necktie—another remnant—and the work done so skilfully that all it lacked was the mark of some expensive shop on the back. For Jerry, a handkerchief, handdrawn with a monogram embroidered, and this was Rusty's chief pride. "Jerry's such a Beau Brummel," she told Henrietta, "he'll appreciate that handkerchief. Nick would just stuff it in his pocket and

never notice; Jerry'll tuck it in elegantly, with one corner sticking out. Nick's great stuff, though. Sometime you shall know my blessed family. To think I'm taking Lee Brainard home with me instead of my old Henny Penny, who's worth two of her!"

"It's all right," Henrietta had protested, "but I'll admit I'm jealous."

"You won't be, when you see my present to you." Rusty patted a flat parcel done up with gay ribbons and seals. "I've put a tremendous lot of thought into it; and you never, *never* failed to come in just as I had it out. The times that—article—has been chucked into a drawer, or stuffed under the petticoat! Fortunately, it couldn't be hurt that way. Only a drenching shower——"

She went on packing her gifts. Something for Father that a blind man could use—that *had* been difficult. It had to be bought, finally—there was nothing to make for him. It was a book of travel, in Braille. It would amuse him to try to pick it out. Then for Grandfather—the Life of a great journalist; that *had* cost like fury, Rusty admitted, though she had finally obtained a slight discount because of a tiny spot on the back cover that nobody would ever notice.

Henrietta went on watching as Rusty dressed for the train, thinking, as she had done a thousand times, that nobody ever did look nicer than her chum when she was ready for the street. Though the little gray

frock was inexpensive, its lines were good, and the small black hat which was pulled over the coppery hair possessed an indubitable touch of pleasant daring. The gray coat was of the sort that is called "good"; it now, though worn, was still presentable. And Rusty's little shoes and stockings and gloves were what they should be. Wherever else she economized, Rusty always bought these articles with care, and fairly nursed them through their existence, that she might never be ashamed in the presence of her friends—nor they of her, which was more important yet, to her mind.

"Rus, you certainly are the corkingest pretty thing I ever saw," was Henrietta's fervent tribute, as Rusty, stooping to close and lock her small trunk, presented her lithe little figure in a particularly engaging posture to her friend—strong young arms, a straight back, a rounded calf; her fascinating profile, the colour in her cheek, all contributing to the effect. "And I don't care how gorgeous Lee Brainard is in her sables, nobody'll take you for her maid on the journey!"

Rusty was laughing as she stood upright again. "No? Well, I don't know that I care what they take me for. It's going to be rather an adventure, having Lee in my home for a fortnight, as you'd understand if you knew my family. They won't care a particle about the sables, or be impressed by them, you know. She'll have to meet their standards, or

they won't really accept her. She may think their standards narrow, but that won't make any difference. People can't get by my mother without her pretty keen judgment on them; and as for my father, he's only blind in his eyes, not his mind. As for Nick and Jerry—well, it'll be interesting to see. And as for the wintry boarder, he's the unknown quantity which makes the problem. So far I don't think he's much worth considering. Well, good-bye till the fourth of January, and be a good Infant while you're away from your Guardian."

Watching from the dingy apartment lobby, where she had gone to see them off, Henrietta's gaze followed them to the last. "Kentucky Lee" the picture of elegance, as usual; tall and dark, with sloe-black eyes and hair, expensively yet quietly dressed, a sort of young princess, slow and graceful of movement as of speech; Rusty like a quick-motioned little hare beside her, her face vivid and merry under her narrow black hat-brim, a copper curl riotously escaping above each ear, as it always did. Odd, wasn't it, that it was Lee, not Rusty, who, whether she would admit it or not, felt herself honoured by the companionship? Lee had begged the invitation—Lee whom a dozen other girls considered playing in luck to be going home for the holidays with Rusty Redfield, captain of her basketball team, editor-in-chief of the women's college weekly magazine. More than

that, a girl whom everybody wanted to be with because something about her, which nobody could exactly define but which they all acknowledged—all except a few bitter rivals—made her stand out from others. In a word, she was one of those people who begin to be recognized early as to be of force all their coming lives.

Rusty was no little saint: that was admitted. She had a "peach of a temper"; she told others precisely what she thought of them; she could score you mercilessly, and then wipe the injury out with a quick speech of affectionate admiration—"In spite of all that, you know, you're a perfect brick, and I'm counting on you to pull us through this crisis," accompanied by a look, and a touch on the shoulder. —Well, it was all indefinable enough, thought Henrietta, reviewing her chum's attributes at the moment of parting, as she had reviewed them many times before. There were plenty of other girls with faces as charming as Rusty's—certainly far more beautiful—who also possessed quick tempers, and good manners, and could talk entertainingly. But there was nobody *like* Rusty, and everybody knew it, and everybody envied Lee Brainard because she was going to see Rusty's village home. And in spite of Lee's money, and beauty, and princess-like presence, nobody envied Rusty having her, except a few sycophants, who were negligible.

CHAPTER XIII

"WELL, well—if it isn't Rusty Redfield!"

"Oh, Cousin Red! How splendid to see you, the first minute!"

They shook hands vigorously, the big doctor and the girl whose head reached just to his shoulders. They had met on the station platform, where two trains had just pulled in from opposite directions at almost the same moment.

"My school friend, Miss Brainard—Doctor Burns, my cousin." Rusty glanced from the one to the other with interested eyes. Kentucky Lee was bound to be pleasantly impressed by this first relative. Not that it mattered specially, but now that she was here Rusty wanted Lee to like everybody.

"Anybody meeting you?"

"I wasn't sure of my train, and told them not to. Nick and Jerry are not home yet. We're going out by trolley."

"Not with my car here. I'll drop Johnny and take you and your luggage."

"Sure you can spare the time, Cousin Red?"

"I'll make the time. Jump in."

They did so gladly, for the December wind was

biting. The car flew down the road, unimpeded by much traffic.

"Is everybody at home quite well?" Rusty asked, eagerly.

"Far as I know. Haven't seen or heard from them for a fortnight."

"I thought you had a patient at the house."

Red laughed. "Treat him mostly by absence. It's your family who are his medicine."

"Oh! According to what I've heard they don't give him much of their time. Mother's too busy, and the others——"

"That's the point. They don't give him much time. He's had too much of everybody's time. Neglect is what he needs. He's improving under it."

"Good! We'll continue the treatment, Lee and I." Rusty's eyes sparkled. "If Lee can. She comes from Kentucky, Cousin Red."

Burns's quick, sidewise glance met that of the soft black eyes under the low hat-brim. "I presume she can't," he admitted. "My wife was a South Carolina girl. They don't make 'em hard and cold down there. But a cold shower after a warm one tones up the constitution, so between you, you two may be good for him."

"Are you interested in your patient, Doctor Burns?" Lee Brainard asked the question in her drawling Southern voice.

"I ought to be, but he doesn't respond quickly enough to my treatment to please me. I'm one of those impatient chaps who like instantaneous results. Nerves aren't in my line. Rusty's family, as I said, are his real treatment."

"He was wished on my family, and you did the wishing. I haven't forgiven you for that, Cousin Red. Didn't you think my mother had enough to look after, without a nervous invalid?"

"People like your mother never have enough to look after, Rusty. The more you give them to do the better they do it, and the stronger they grow. You wouldn't want to give her a soft life from now on, would you?"

"I certainly should. Luxury, and plenty of it. Time and money to travel and see the world. Lovely clothes, such as she'd wear like a duchess. A chance to influence big masses of people, as she could—how she could! I'd like to see my mother in gray broadcloth and a stunning little hat, speaking from a platform. She'd *say* something!"

"She surely would!" Red agreed to that. "But somehow, just where she is, Rusty——"

"Oh, yes, I know—just where she is!" Rusty's tone was impatient. "But you don't waste a high-powered printing-press on turning out movie handbills, do you? Mother ought to have a great big place in the world, instead of washing pots and kettles

and snatching ten minutes at a time to read the things her splendid mind needs to keep an edge on it." And Rusty beat her small gloved fist on the frame of the car door.

Both Lee Brainard and Doctor Burns were laughing.

"Your topknot's as red as ever, isn't it, Rusty-locks?" commented her cousin. "Is she a fire-eater at school, Miss Brainard? I suppose so."

"Oh, yes, indeed," the guest agreed. "That's why she's so popular. When we are dull, all we need is to come in contact with Rusty Redfield and the sparks of interest begin to fly. Why, I actually begged this invitation to come home with her, Doctor Burns, because I wanted to see how the sparks flew in a different environment."

"You did wisely. I want to see her myself. Her red head and mine, when we put 'em together, make something of a conflagration."

The car speeded, the miles were covered, and Rusty Redfield was rushing into the old house, leaving Doctor Burns to bring the guest.

"Dad!" The blind man found himself embraced by vigorous young arms; a cold, fresh cheek was pressed against his own. "Daddy! Bless your soul, how glad I am to see you! You dear—you peach—you best that ever was!"

His hair was rumpled all over his head, as if he were a small boy, and she another; then she smoothed

it down again, laughing. Kisses landed on his ears, his nose, his smiling lips. Then Rusty was across the room.

"Grandfather Reddy! How are you, you old splendid person!" Her ringing tones reached his deaf ears; her eyes looking into his were warm with delight. His gnarled hands were on her shoulders, holding her.

"Rusty, child! What you bring into the house! And how we get along without you I don't know."

"Where's Mother? Heavens, where's Mother? I can't wait to see her."

Rusty wheeled, looking about her. Her gay glance fell on a figure unknown, a thin, stoop-shouldered figure, which had risen from a chair by a window which looked out on the garden, partially concealed by the square piano. She went a step or two toward it, involuntarily, for she was now under her own roof, and this was a stranger.

"I suppose you're Mr. Rowe," she said, and Felix felt suddenly that she saw everything about him. Unconsciously she had let the warmth fall out of her voice, out of her eyes; she regarded him coolly, appraisingly. Felix felt himself straightening his shoulders as he bent his head, his heels together, in his most formal bow.

"Yes, this is Mr. Rowe," said her father. "He's quite a member of the family now, Rusty."

"Is he? Are you living up to my family, Mr. Rowe?" The audacious question startled him.

"That would be difficult, Miss Redfield. Your family are—themselves."

"You're quite right. And *where's* my mother—Oh!" She became aware that Doctor Burns and Lee Brainard were now in the room. She made hasty introductions. In the midst of them the sound of voices at the door turned her about, her eyes afire. "*There's* Mother! And oh, my heart! that's Nick's voice—and Jerry's——"

Felix now witnessed such a family reunion as he had never seen or imagined. The room suddenly seemed full of people—interesting people. It would have made a captivating scene upon a stage. There was Nicholas Redfield, as red-headed as the sister he swung up to his shoulder and down again—broad-shouldered, vigorous, with a keen eye, a wide, laughing mouth, and a voice of such subdued vigour as only the young college man of the present day can compass—the lowest voice in the room as it said emphatically: "Rusty, old girl, you're the best thing that's happened to me since I met Mother at the gate." There was Jerry Redfield, astonishingly dark and slim, taller than his elder brother, with black eyebrows drawn together in a frown, though his lips smiled. And there was a young girl, Jinny—round-cheeked, red-haired again, with a freckled, plain little

face that had something nice and engaging about it. She hung on Rusty's neck.

Last of all there was Mrs. Redfield herself, at the sight of whom Rusty grew sober. She went over to her mother, laid both hands on her shoulders and looked long into the fine eyes which looked straight back into hers. Then she put her lips to Marcia's in a quiet kiss. It was as if turning from a noisy crowd she had dropped upon her knees.

Lee Brainard looked on at all these greetings with envious eyes. She was very quiet and sweet of manner as Rusty finally presented her. The sight of Felix Rowe and Nick and Jerry Redfield had instantly set a stage for her; she had an impression to make. She hadn't expected to see three such challenging faces in the old farmhouse. Worth begging an invitation to meet them?—well, rather!

Then, presently, Lee was upstairs, being shown into a room. It was a little room, tucked under the eaves, such as she had never slept in in her life. But that didn't matter. It was exquisitely clean, and the patchwork quilt folded across the foot of the narrow bed was of a faded blue and white which matched the faded blue and white of the braided gray rugs on the painted gray floor and made a harmony which pleased the eye. A blue pottery candlestick with a tall white candle stood upon a chest of drawers beside her bed.

"You'll have to be careful not to set yourself on fire," Rusty warned her. "We've never put in even gas, and lamps and candles are our only wear. If you want to read in bed you shall have two candles, but Father won't let us use lamps up here under the eaves."

"Oh, I love candles," Lee cried. "I love everything here, Rusty. Your home is adorable. And your mother—what a wonderful-looking woman! I'm crazy to know her! And all your family. They're such fascinating people!"

Now Rusty hated that sort of thing, but she had known she would have it from Lee. The family wouldn't like it, either. She decided on the instant that she wouldn't have it, and that she must take a firm hand with Lee, from the start. So she closed the door, latching it carefully, set her back against it, and spoke with decision.

"Now, my dear," she said, "I'm going to give you a bit of advice. You want us all to like you, don't you?"

Lee, amazed at this beginning, even from Rusty, who had college-wide reputation for audacity, gazed at her with puzzled eyes.

"Why, yes, of course," she said.

"Well, then, don't begin to praise us. We're a perfectly usual family; there are hundreds like us—all except Mother—there's only one of her. But we live in this plain old house, and there aren't forks

enough that match to go around twice. We don't mind a bit, because there are things we value more. We know we can make you comfortable, and that you'll probably be entertained by our antics. But if you begin by telling us how much you like everything and everybody—well, you won't make a hit, that's all. I have to say this, because you're that type, and you come from Kentucky, where the habit of saying pleasant things is born in everybody. Of course, to them, it's just good manners to do it—I admit that. I don't know this person Felix Rowe, but I can vouch for the rest of us not wanting people to pat us on the back. If you like us, in spite of our terrible faults, you can do it, but for Heaven's sake don't *tell* us you do in that raving sort of way."

Lee was hurt, of course, as she had every reason to be, because of this extraordinarily candid advice. Yet as she continued to gaze at Rusty's enchanting face and steady eyes, and saw the peculiar twist of her firm mouth at which people always looked with admiration, she knew that it behooved her not to get angry and sulk, but to hold up her head and answer back.

"Of course that sounds rather odd, Rusty, the very first minute I'm here. But if that's what you want of me, I'll close my lips and praise nothing. I came to get an unusual sensation, and I seem to have it, without much waiting."

Rusty burst into a laugh. "I hoped I'd strike a spark," she admitted. She came over and put her hand on her guest's shoulder. "Forgive me?"

"Oh, of course, I forgive anything—from you, Rusty!" Lee said, smiling again. "You know I adore you."

Once more Rusty burst into flame, drawing her brows together. "That's just *it!*" she cried softly. "*Don't* forgive it—from *me!* Resent it—I'll like you the better for it. I know I'm being rude, but I'm doing it for your good. I don't want to be adored, Lee—I don't. Somebody's always adoring me at school—Heaven knows why! I don't want you to adore me, or my home, or anything. I want you to just like us in a perfectly natural way for our good points and not like us for our bad ones—we've got 'em, you know. There, that's all—and quite enough. I'm sorry, really, but I had to have it out."

Pride came to Lee's rescue. She looked Rusty in the eye. "You *are* a little brute," she said firmly, "and I'd go home this minute if I didn't want to stay and see just what you're like in your own home. But I promise you one thing—not a word of praise for anything shall come out of me while I'm here!"

This time Rusty's laugh was delicious. "In that case I shall probably come around wagging my tail and begging for it," she said. And went out and closed the door. Turning, she looked, laughing,

back at it. The truth was she had written her mother that for very special reasons she wanted her to put Miss Brainard in this, the smallest room in the house, and the only one she could have had without displacing anybody. No doubt but that Rusty Redfield was no little saint.

CHAPTER XIV

RUSTY! Did you think I could wait any longer to see you?"

"Goodness, Andy Carter! Of course I didn't. Nor I to see you!"

The two pairs of hands met, grasped firmly for about ten seconds, fell apart. Meeting Rusty Redfield after three months' separation was like meeting a lively boy. The effect was as if she threw up her cap for joy at meeting her good friend Andy, but instantly afterward plunged into affairs.

"Your hair's even sandier than I thought it was, Handy Andy!" Rusty went on. "And there's a bit of curl in it I'd forgotten. Your nose is a trifle longer than I should have said—that's hunting for news, I suppose. Your chin sticks out precisely as much as ever. Altogether——"

"Your hair is even redder than I recalled it," countered Carter, "and your ridiculous little nose——"

Rusty laughed. "Don't dare say it," she commanded. "Come in and see——"

"No, I don't want to see the family," Carter interrupted. "The family are splendid, but I want to see you—just you."

They were standing in the hall, which was freezing cold. No rooms or hallways except those which contained stoves were warm in December in this house. Carter turned to the old hatrack, on which hung the gray coat and little black hat which he knew to be Rusty's. He could have hugged them.

"I've brought home a friend," said Rusty in a whisper—they were just outside the door of the living-room where everybody had gathered. "She's from Kentucky, and she's very beautiful to look at. Come in and see her. And Nick and Jerry——"

But Carter had the coat down, and was holding it for her. "Come on, please," he urged. "Come for a walk—time enough to see everybody when we get back. Slip away with me, quick, before anybody stops us. We won't be gone long. And it's a peach of a night."

The last words made her yield. A winter night could always beckon Rusty; she loved nothing so much as to get out and walk "under the wide and starry sky." She slipped her arms into the coat, and snatched her scarf from the rack. Joyfully Carter threw open the door and closed it noiselessly after them. Even as he did so he heard the voice of Nick or Jerry shout Rusty's name. She was always in demand; he had got her away none too soon. He rushed her down the path to the road and out upon it. There was only a thin coating of snow and

ice upon the cement of the highway, easy walking; and the night, as he had said, was worth coming out to see.

"Take my arm," he begged. "We can keep step so much better."

She shook her head. "I like my hands in my pockets. Come along—we don't have to hang to each other. I can't keep step with such a Daddy-Long-Legs, anyway."

They marched off, the best of comrades. Carter was so happy he could hardly bear it, just to have her near. Rusty was frankly delighting in being back with her friend, but delighting in so many things as well that he couldn't be sure how much of it really belonged to himself.

"Everything looks wonderful to me," she exulted. "I like dozens of things I can't think well of when I'm here to stay. The worn old carpet on the hall stairs; the dipper with the dent in it that hangs over the kitchen sink; the two steps down into the woodshed; the nicks in the best dishes—things like that. And the things I really do like, and always have—Durham Cathedral over the piano; that row of red books in the middle of the bookcase; the blue-bordered rag-rugs in my room; the pink lustre cups in the corner cupboard. Oh, there are such lots of things to be glad to see again. Don't you *know?*"

"No, I don't know—by experience," Carter owned

regretfully. "But I can guess how your home looks to you. It's certainly a dear home."

"Oh, Andy, how could I? Of course you don't know—all your life an orphan. And you didn't have so much as a maiden aunt who doted on you!"

"I had a maiden aunt who did her duty by me—you know—till I went away to school. She couldn't have doted on me—I was a tow-headed, freckle-faced limb of Satan in the days she had the ill-luck to look after me. She was a vinegary person at her best. But I've no doubt I owe a certain stubbornness of will to her disciplines."

"No, you don't—you owe it to that chin, my dear friend. A chin like that simply can't retreat and leave its owner to weakness of character."

"Rusty—excuse me—turn your head so I can see your profile, will you? There's a lighted window just beyond you over there—I can get a view. Yes, I thought so. If my chin has anything over yours——"

"What nonsense! Let's stop talking about our features and mention something more important. I meant to tell the editor of the *Arrow* that his last issue was the best he's done yet. And after my past bitter criticisms that ought to cheer him."

"It does, immensely. What did you particularly like?"

She told him, and she had a clean-cut reason for

every statement she made. That was the best of Rusty. Vague flattery was never a method of hers; if she liked a thing she liked it, and knew exactly why. She made Carter flush with pleasure, for it was a long time since she had given him such good measure of discerning praise.

"Well, that's great to hear from you," he said, when she came to a pause. "That makes me want to outdo myself, for love of—of hearing you tell me you like it."

"But I haven't told you the best," she went on. "I've saved it for the last. I took a copy of the *Arrow* into Foxy's classroom the other day—Professor Fox's class, you know, in journalism. He'd asked us all to bring in newspapers that we liked, or disliked. Nearly everyone but me brought an impressive city daily—mostly ones he knew. He said scathing things about some of them and admiring things about others; then he remarked: 'Why have none of you brought me your home-town papers? Most of you come from small towns, don't you? Isn't there anything interesting to you in your own sectional or local news? They're doing big things in Kansas, Mr. Searle. Exciting things in Wisconsin, Miss Lombard. I gave you all a week's warning. Didn't any of you send for the *Gazette*, or the *Weekly Banner*, or the *Oak's Corners News?*'

"Well, there was a chap from Pennsylvania who

had brought a weekly from his little home town. He read a funny little editorial from it, which Foxy enjoyed. I was hugging myself to think I'd passed up the *New York Times* and brought the *Eastville Arrow!* He'd had everybody read some one thing from the paper he'd selected to prove his interest in it. I'd purposely kept my contribution till the last, refusing to catch his eye. When finally I let him call on me—Foxy's good to me when he sees I really want him to wait—I got up and unfolded your sheet." She looked up at Carter, scanning his face in the dim light.

"Well,"—he looked down at her—"get it over, my dear. I find myself all on tiptoe to know what the great Foxy said of our little paper. If I'd been there I should have trembled in my oxfords."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't. You'd have sat there, with your chin thrust out, ready to fire back at him if he hit too hard. Well, then, I read—no, Andy, not your inspired editorial on 'Christmas in the Air,' though I was proud of that—but that half column of liquid fire you poured out about the old lady who was found dead just round the corner from the centre of the town, that made us all ache with remorse. When I'd finished—and I read it in a perfectly unthrilling way, Andy, as you'd have wanted me to, not in a voice 'quivering with emotion'—I sat down without looking at Foxy. The room was absolutely

still for a good minute, then Professor Winstead Fox said very quietly, in a certain tone he has that means that sarcasm and criticism have all gone out of him: 'The writer of that understands the very thing I have been trying for three months to make clear to this class—that it's the simplest English which is the most effective. Without the slightest straining for effect he has made us *see* that pathetic scene in a light which penetrates to our inmost motives. That's unusual—and very fine. If that is your home-town paper, Miss Redfield, I hope it contains much from that editor's pen.'"

A little sound from Carter's throat showed her that the story had touched him. She didn't know that more to him than the professor's comment was the fact that she had chosen to take the *Arrow* to the classroom, believing in its quality.

It wasn't till Rusty made him, that Carter turned round to walk with her toward home. She couldn't realize what it was to him to have her back, and he knew it wasn't safe to tell her.

CHAPTER XV

"PAPA, I don't think Felie's getting along. His letter doesn't sound good to me."

It was the greeting Tracy Rowe expected. When Felix didn't write, his mother worried about him, and when he did she worried more. Tracy was barely inside the house before her anxieties met him. Personally, he was too busy to worry over Felix, now that he had done for him all he could.

"Well," he said, as patiently as he could manage, "let's have it. Anything new?"

"No, that's just it. He doesn't seem to be getting any benefit. Listen to this." And she read aloud the brief letter. If she could have known just how reluctantly her son always sat down to the task of the weekly letter, she could have understood that to him it was a long one. But he might have made it a kinder one—if he had realized how his depression of spirit showed through his words.

DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER:

Nothing new to tell you. Three very good meals a day. Everybody occupied except me. I go for a walk in the orchard or down the road every day. In

the evening Mrs. Redfield reads aloud, and I usually listen to that, for lack of anything else to do. She is a very good reader, and I might join in the discussions that follow if I weren't too lazy. Altogether I'm sure I'm doing all you want me to do, including the drinking of milk till I'm a tank of it. I sleep pretty well, as a rule, and think I must have gained a pound or two, but I can't say that fact specially contributes to my interest in life. Your Doctor Burns doesn't give me much time, but he does well enough. Everything does well enough, so you've no cause for worry. When I've had enough of this to satisfy you I'll move on to the next sanitarium, that being evidently the programme for the remainder of my useless life.

The young people of the family are all coming home for the Holidays. I expect to sit in the chimney corner with the two other old men of the household and look on at their youthful spirits and listen to their banalities—until I go to my room to escape them. My presence won't contribute much to their enjoyment of their home, but that can't be helped.

Don't bother to send me any Christmas gifts. I'm not equal to looking up any for you, and there's nothing I need—except a new body and a general equipment for life that I shall never get, here or anywhere else.

Yours, as ever,

FELIX.

Mrs. Rowe looked up, her lips trembling. Tracy wished her lips didn't tremble so often. Some women had more control of their lips, he knew. Look at Miss Rigden, in his office. She had her troubles, he understood that, because he couldn't help knowing when she lost members of her family—three, within the last two years. Financial troubles, too—she had dropped considerable money in investments. But she kept a brave face on it. He had never seen her shed a tear. Why couldn't Bessie be of stronger fibre? Tears never helped any situation.

"You see, Tracy. He isn't any better. That doctor isn't doing anything for him. I wish you'd write to him and ask him why he doesn't do more for Felix. And ask him what he thinks about him. Oh, do please write, Tracy. Seems as if I couldn't stand Felie's letters, when they keep on being like this. They're all like this—every week. Not a word to give us any encouragement. Won't you write, Tracy—write to-night?"

Of course Tracy did. He didn't want to write, but Bessie kept on asking him—crying a little all the while, of course—till at last he sat down at his desk and composed a letter to Doctor Burns. The sweat stood out upon his broad brow when he had done. He was accustomed to dictating all his letters to Miss Rigden, who could put into concise and correct shape his most involved sentences. It bothered him badly

to have to do the thing all himself. He had proposed writing from the office to-morrow, secretly depending on Miss Rigden to do it, but Bessie would give him no peace. So the letter was written at home.

DR. R. P. BURNS——

(He had started to write "Brown," and had had to begin again. He never could get the man's name straight.)

DEAR SIR:

In re to my son Felix who is now under your kind care. Letters from him *re* his condition are not satisfactory to his mother and myself. He don't seem to be getting along as we could wish and hoped he would when sent to you. His mother wishes me to ask you if you could send us a statement *re* his condition. We would not wish him to know that I have written to you, as that might make him nervous about himself. I would appreciate this favour from you, doctor, for we are anxious to know how our son is, and he will never tell us himself. Thanking you in advance for this favour, I am, with best regards,

Yours very truly,

T. M. ROWE.

Red Pepper Burns read this letter twice through before he put it back into its envelope. It told him very nearly all he needed to know "*in re*" his pa-

tient's background of home and progenitors. People of not much school education—a self-made man, a "worrying" wife, but they loved their son and deserved to know what he could tell them that would be of encouragement. He wrote his reply carefully, and read that also twice over before he sent it out. When T. M. Rowe received and read it, he knew—for he was shrewd enough—that Felix's physician was a man who understood his business. Tracy Rowe always respected a man who understood his business, whatever it might be.

He read the letter aloud to Bessie with real enjoyment:

My dear Mr. Rowe:

It is very natural that you should wish a first-hand report of your son's present condition, and I am glad to give it to you.

I drove out to see him to-day, that I might have the latest news of him. I found him reading aloud to Mr. Redfield, who, as he may have told you, is blind. I understand that he has been doing this once a day for some weeks. This act, I am sure you will agree, is bound to be of the greatest benefit to Felix, because it is done for someone who is worse off than himself.

I learned that he no longer remains in his room most of the time, as he had been doing, but stays more or

less about the house, where he is in contact with other members of the family. On a recent occasion, when Mrs. Redfield was suddenly called away at the close of a meal, and the blind man and the deaf man attempted to clear the table and wash the dishes, your son rallied to their assistance, and between the three the task was accomplished. I would have given much to have been a first-hand witness of this performance, but it was not my luck to arrive until it was over.

Felix's appetite is pretty good, and he is sleeping fairly well. When he doesn't sleep he has learned to regard the matter as negligible, more or less.

Of course he has a long way to go, still, in his return to a normal life. These are but infant steps on the road we wish him to take. It may be a long time before he will march off with the stride of a man. But I consider the points I have mentioned as real gains. I hope you will regard them in the same way. Meanwhile, he will be closely under my observation. I consider his presence in the Redfield home the most desirable and hopeful means I know of to his change of viewpoint. The thing can't be done in a day, or a month, but—slowly and surely—I believe the contact will tell.

Please consider me, with every good wish,

Yours to command,

R. P. Burns.

"Isn't that a fine letter, Bessie?" Tracy Rowe exulted, as he finished reading. "This Burns seems to be an everyday sensible sort of a fellow, and he's interested in Felix's case. We couldn't ask for a better doctor."

"But, Tracy,"—Mrs. Rowe looked bewildered—"I can't see as he really tells us anything about him. Reading to a blind man—and washing the dishes—that doesn't tell us anything about how he *is*."

"Now, Bessie!" Tracy considered his wife with a sudden sense of her lack of human wisdom, as he almost never had felt it so poignantly before. "Can't you see it's good for him to do things like that? I've said all along that what he needed was to get his mind off himself. Well, he *got* it off himself, didn't he?—when he was doing those things, anyhow. It wouldn't *hurt* him to wash a few dishes! I'd like to have seen him doing it," he chuckled.

But Mrs. Rowe couldn't see it. "He says his appetite is *pretty* good. And he only sleeps *fairly* well. What does he mean by 'regard the matter as negligible'?" She stumbled over the last word.

Tracy was amazed at her ignorance. "Why, not worth worrying about," he expounded. "Isn't that what I've always said—if he could get his mind off himself? Well, if he's stopped worrying because he doesn't sleep, isn't that a good thing? Look-a here, Bessie, you don't want to pick this doctor's

letter all to pieces, and try to find something wrong with it. See what he says: 'It may be a long time before he will march off with the stride of a man. But I consider the points I have mentioned as real gains. I hope you will regard them in the same way.' Isn't that enough for us? This doctor says he's getting better, slow but sure. Lord knows we ought to be satisfied if he's getting better, no matter how slow it is."

But Bessie wasn't satisfied, and he couldn't make her so. She wanted to go and see Felix for herself. To her, Felix's own letter weighed more heavily than that of Doctor Burns as evidence that he wasn't getting on. She thought they both ought to go.

"He's our only son, Tracy," she pointed out, as she had been pointing out since the day the boy was born, "and we ought not to put him off on other people to get him well. I want to go up there, and I think you ought to go, too; and I don't know's I'd like to take the journey alone. We could take along his Christmas presents to him—and maybe something for the Redfields, so we'd feel as if we were paying for our visit. We——"

"He says he doesn't want any Christmas present," Mr. Rowe began, but was instantly overwhelmed by a torrent.

"Oh, Tracy! What if he says he doesn't! Everybody wants Christmas presents. Why, I've been

making 'em for him ever since he went away. Silk pajamas, that he likes—pink and blue, they are—lovely. And a pair of slippers I've embroidered—pink roses and blue forget-me-nots, to go with the pajamas. And I've got handkerchiefs for him—silk ones—and some red leather things to hold his neckties and collars. Why, I can't tell you all I've planned for his Christmas, Tracy. And now you don't want me to go." The threatening storm of tears burst, as Tracy had foreseen it would. As usual, he was helpless.

So they went. Not instantly, though Mrs. Rowe would have liked to take the next train. But Tracy put her off for a week.

CHAPTER XVI

RUSTY, Jinny, and Nick were "doing the dishes." Jerry was putting them away. Marcia Redfield was taking a vacation from dishes, if not from cooking, which she insisted on having a hand in. None of her children could equal her in cooking, though Rusty was fair at it, and there were two or three dishes Nick could produce with great success.

Rusty, her hands in the foamy suds, put the plates and cups through at a terrific pace: it took both her wipers to keep up with her.

"Look out—you chipped that one!" Nick exhibited it.

Rusty eyed it disdainfully. "For a cent I'd smash it now. I'd like to smash the whole outfit, and get Mother something new to look at. Children,"—she sank her voice to a whisper—"does it strike you Mother's—showing her age a bit?"

There was a chorus of protests: "Not so you'd notice it," from Nick. "Oh, Rusty—no!" from Jinny, horrified. Jerry, wheeling to look at her, fairly hissed his answer: "Simpleton—she never looked better."

"I don't mean in looks, exactly. I don't know

just what I do mean. Only—she doesn't seem to—well, sparkle quite the way she did. She laughs at us—with us—she doesn't make *us* laugh, the way she always has."

"She doesn't get a chance. Our tongues have wagged every instant since we came into the house, like the imbeciles' tongues they are. If we'd hold up she might come to the front. Besides, the presence of Gloom in our midst would take the sparkle out of anybody. Hang the fellow! I believe he's made a bet with himself that he won't smile while he's here." And Nick set down an old brown jug with such emphasis that it all but cracked. "What they ever took him in for is beyond me."

"He *is* queer. But I suppose he's sick," little Jinny said, thoughtfully. "I sort of like him, since I played chess with him last evening. He didn't say hardly a word to me, but goodness, I had to watch like everything. He was quicker than lightning. And he did smile a little when he got my queen."

"He *would!*" Nick made up a face. "He wouldn't have smiled if you'd got his."

"I *wanted* him to beat," Jinny declared, stoutly.

"You *would*, Freckle-Angel-Face!" said her brother Nick, shaking the drops from a wet basin over her thick braids. "You were born that way. The rest of us came into the world hating people who are eternally down on their luck and letting everybody

know it. If Gloom just knew how I seethe with the wish to take him out in a snowdrift and wash his long face for him! Xerxes and Xenophon! The man who can sit and look at my game blind father, and my old deaf corking grandfather, and then go on thinking about his little troubles——"

"Maybe they're not so little, Nicky," Jinny began, her round face sober.

But Nick fairly shouted—if a shout can be done under the breath—"They *are* little, Gosling—at his age. Nobody under forty has any right to act like an old man, no matter how shaky his blooming nerves are. Nerves! *I'd* like to be in charge of his nerves for a while. I'll bet I'd—extirpate 'em!"

"Why don't you try?" Rusty gave him a wicked glance. "Go to it, Hercules. Take the sick Hermes and get the wings on his heels to grow again. I understand he did have wings once. Mother says he was a brilliant newspaper writer. Make him do an article on 'Family Life As No City Newspaper Man Would Ever Believe It Is Lived.'"

Nick laughed. Then there flashed into his hazel eyes the dawn of an idea. He flung down his dish-towel.

"We'll give a play for him," he said, chuckling. "We'll do it to-night. It'll be a mystery play. Characters: *Gloom*, *Irony*, *Mirth*, and—and——"

Rusty had caught fire. Touch Rusty with the

tiniest spark and she always caught fire and became a blaze on the instant. "And *Pluck*," she finished for him, her eyes flashing, her lips impish.

Four faces were now alight. Plays, inspired by any challenging idea, worked out in a half hour by four eager minds, staged with half-a-dozen properties, and produced with impromptu lines spoken by actors who took their cues from one another on the stimulus of the instant, had been done by the young Redfields since the days when Mother Goose and Hans Andersen had been their idols. Marcia and Lincoln Redfield had helped these tendencies along as the years went on, had brought forward some of the great scenes of literature, had taken parts themselves. "The Redfields" might have formed themselves into a company of players, at any hour, with their powers of mimicry all to the good. Well did their neighbourhood know of what their combined efforts were capable.

"Jerry'll be *Gloom*." Nick was assigning the parts already, though the pots and kettles were now depressing his spirits—or would have been, if his imagination hadn't been soaring above them. "Jinny'll do for *Mirth*. Rusty—you or I for *Irony?*"

"*Irony* for me. I'll love it. And you, with your brawny arms bared to the shoulder, your magnificent torso showing through your torn shirt, your 'head bloody but unbowed,'—ah, what a *Pluck* you'll make!"

Nick pulled her little ears with his big, damp fingers —caught up the soap and smeared it across her mouth. And got it in his eyes in retaliation. The old kitchen rang with laughter.

In the sitting-room Lee Brainard and Felix Rowe, sitting with the chess-board between them, exchanged half-whispered comments. At the other end of the room Marcia Redfield read aloud to her husband, her fine voice rising and falling in low tones. Grandfather Redfield, unable to hear, or to read by lamplight, sat close by the fire, his head sunk on his breast. He was not asleep—his thoughts were busy with other days, after the habit of old men whose minds have not grown old with their bodies. In fancy he was hurrying copy to the press in the dingy building where he had held the office of editor of the county paper. He had just finished a stinging editorial, in reply to a gibe from a rival, insolent, unjust, had read it through, had seen that it was good, and had called the office boy with orders to have it set up if the press was held up for it. He was half smiling as he sat by the fire. Those were great days—great days—with their rushing hours of hard work. It warmed the heart to recall them. At least he had lived while he had lived, he told himself. And he wasn't through living—thank God, he wasn't through!

At sound of the laughter, ringing through from the kitchen, Lee had looked up smiling at Felix. Some-

thing about his thin, unhappy face interested her romantically. He had strange, melancholy eyes, she thought—eyes like Hamlet's. His profile was sharp but rather fine. His slow, satiric way of speaking delighted her. She had known many young men, as attractive Southern girls invariably do, but they had all been gay dogs, incessantly laughing, fooling, paying court. It was a new experience to meet this tragic chap of apparently maturer years, enduring his unhappy days of ill health as best he might among these country people. His indifference to everything and everybody about him was to Lee tremendously interesting. If only she could wake up those wretched eyes, bring a gleam of pleasure into them, what a triumph it would be, compared with that of succeeding in amusing any ordinary young man surfeited with the company of girls. She had worn her most charming clothes, ever since she came, three days ago, with a view of stimulating Felix, rather than of captivating Nick or Jerry, who didn't appeal to her in the same way at all. They were nice fellows, for country boys, she admitted; but it was this world-weary person who was worth the real art she was capable of exerting.

"What healthy laughter!" she said, in a low tone to Felix. "How perfect one knows their digestion must be! They've never known a moment's depression in all their lives."

"They do sound care-free," Felix replied, and moved his left bishop with devastating effect. "You shouldn't have let me do that," he added. "Sorry."

"Oh, but I'm never clever enough to see the frightful things you are going to do to me till it's too late. I don't suppose a woman's brain can be quite as adequate to chess problems as a man's, anyway. But I'll learn a little, I hope, under you. It's an education, to be allowed to play with you."

"Thanks—I'm merely a duffer at it." But Felix's glance lingered a little on the slender white fingers as they fluttered above a pawn, hesitating. There was a very beautiful ring on Lee's right third finger—platinum set with diamonds and one clear emerald. And there was a fascinating supplementary ring of unusual distinction on the little finger next it. It was perfectly natural that all moves should be made with that flashing right hand. What is a right hand for? Lee's frock was emerald green—simple, but with what women call the "right lines." Rusty Redfield had no frocks like that. The best she could do, these winter evenings, was to put on a little tawny dress of crêpe (dyed from an old white one) with a black girdle, and a little black necklace of inferior beads. With her coppery locks the effect was very good, but beside Lee and her emerald silks and platinum-set diamonds, Rusty was an insignificant figure. Or to be exact, Lee tried to think she was. For Lee,

from adoration of Rusty, had turned to this more satisfying game of challenging the attention of Felix Rowe. Rusty might play with her brothers—poor sport! Lee preferred contact with somebody worth while, who knew the world as these country boys didn't, even though they were at college. And the more languid and bored Felix was, the more fun it was going to be to wake him up—no possible doubt of that.

The dishes were done. The workers hung up aprons and towels, ran up to the bathroom to wash their hands with soap which was not dish-pan soap, and ran down again. They came in, Rusty's arm through Jerry's, Nick's arm on little Jinny's shoulder, while she snuggled up to him. They went straight to the piano. Into the reading and the chess playing came the crash of chords, struck by Jerry's slender fingers on the old ivory piano keys. Four voices broke into a college song, singing it with gusto. Marcia Redfield laid down her book, smiling happily, her eyes on her lusty four: three red heads like the Redfields, one brown like the Rusts, her own family. Her husband's face lighted with keen pleasure. Grandfather Redfield, whose deaf ears could hear those resounding tones—it would have been a stony deafness indeed which couldn't!—lifted his head and thanked God again that he was living, and that these splendid young lives had come from his.

Lee Brainard looked up at Felix, and his eyes met hers.

"What babes they are!" said the two pairs of eyes to one another. "And how little they know of life—as *we* know it!"

CHAPTER XVII

I DO think we ought to telegraph ahead, Tracy, and let them know we're coming. Maybe it won't be convenient, and Felix mightn't like it."

"Nonsense, Bessie. We're going to a hotel anyway, aren't we?—And then take a taxi and drive to wherever they are. Better to surprise the boy. I guess we can call on this Redfield family without wiring 'em we're coming. People expect surprises at Christmas anyway, and you've got enough stuff in your trunk to pay our way, I guess."

"Yes, I guess I have." Mrs. Rowe thought with some complacency of the shopping trip she had made the day before. She had a very nice gift for everyone of the household of whom she had heard, and she had made Tracy buy a box of the most expensive cigars known for Doctor Burns. As for Felix himself, there was everything she could think of, including several additions to the articles she had been making for him at the time when the trip to see him had been planned.

On the way up the state their train ran into a heavy snowstorm, and their arrival was delayed. Instead of getting into the city station, five miles from the

Redfield home, at an early afternoon hour, it was nearly six o'clock when they finally reached the end of their journey. They drove to a hotel, secured rooms, ate a hasty meal, and then called for their taxicab. Tracy Rowe scorned to take a trolley which might get tied up by the storm. Five miles into the country was an order which made the driver shake his head, but Tracy Rowe knew when and how to fee heavily, and chains were put upon the car and the slow trip made. When they drew up at last before the Redfield home it was eight o'clock.

Mrs. Rowe had been worrying all the way. "Maybe we oughtn't to come in on them so late. If it keeps on storming they may have to let us stay all night. I do think we ought to have waited till morning."

"Now, Bessie, cut it out. We're here, and we haven't got any excuse to make. It isn't late—and if it was, we're Felix's parents, aren't we?"

The sight of the house, lighted in every lower window and several upper ones, was reassuring. Mrs. Rowe had had some sort of an idea that country people went to bed by eight o'clock, even, perhaps, on Christmas Eve. But her heart beat hard as she followed her husband up the path, setting her small feet in the tracks his big ones made for her. Both were carrying packages which they had taken from the trunk—large packages. Surely they would be welcome, obviously bearing gifts.

"You be here for us at ten," Mr. Rowe had told his driver, who had warned him that the wait would cost him a goodly sum. "*That's* all right," Tracy had assured him.

They found no bell, but discovered a knocker. This Mr. Rowe made resound, while his wife shrank anxiously. It seemed to her a bombardment, yet she was so eager to see her son that she was trembling in every nerve, and would have been willing to storm a fortress to get at him. In less than a minute a broad-shouldered young figure loomed in the doorway, and Nicholas Redfield gazed wonderingly out at the two who showed cold-reddened, eager, middle-aged faces in the light from the lamp on the hall table.

"We're Mr. and Mrs. Rowe," said Tracy Rowe, firmly. "Is our son Felix in? We thought we'd surprise him."

"Why, yes—of course, Mr. Rowe. Come in, please. Let me take your packages. What a night to drive out here in. I wonder you made it. Mother —Dad," he called into the room at his left. "Here are Mr. and Mrs. Rowe!"

The next minute they were in the midst of things. Mrs. Rowe hadn't expected to see so many people. At first sight it seemed a party. Out of the midst of the group a tall woman with a clear-cut face, from which heavy dark hair was swept back and into a

coronet above a smooth broad brow, came forward with outstretched, welcoming hand.

"How very splendid this is! You couldn't have come at a better time. Come right through into this room and take off all those snowy things. —But first—Felix——"

So she needed to summon him, he was so slow in realizing who the arrivals were, or else—so reluctant to greet them. He got to his feet, from the corner by the fire where he had been sitting beside Lee Brainard, and advanced leisurely. His mother stared at him, her face, as Marcia Redfield noted it, wearing an almost pathetic expression, a mixture of ardour and shyness, which was very nearly fright, like that of a dog who doesn't know whether he is to be caressed or sent to heel. Was Felix going to be glad they had come, or sorry? Mrs. Redfield looked at him, as he crossed the room, and if she had ever wanted to make a man assume the part he logically and mercifully should play, it was at that moment.

Well, he was polite—that was about all she could say of him. He kissed his mother on her thin, cold cheek, and shook hands with his father, and—"Well, this *is* a surprise," he said. . . . "How are you?" he added, which didn't help it much. Dr. Redfield Pepper Burns, who had risen, like the rest of the men in the room, was eyeing him with an intense desire to kick him. One sharp, understanding glance at

Mr. and Mrs. Rowe had told him all he needed to know about them, supplementing the letter he had had from Tracy Rowe, and which he had not forgotten. He put his hand through the arm of Lincoln Redfield, who was gropingly making his way forward, and the two came up to the Rowes.

"We're very glad indeed to see you," said the blind man heartily, holding out his hand to one after the other. "This is Doctor Burns, your son's doctor."

"I call this a gorgeous surprise for any son," said Burns, shaking hands and bestowing the friendliest of looks upon the two travellers. "Simply gorgeous. And when you get those wraps off, the rest of us will make you welcome. Well! To have one's father and mother walk in on one on Christmas Eve—jolly! If Felix weren't such a restrained young man he'd have hugged you up tight, before us all. I wish *my* father and mother were alive and walking into this room!"

It was a rebuke, and Felix so understood it. He hated Burns cordially for it, yet he knew he deserved it. Anyhow, it made him play up, as it was bound to do. He followed the pair into the downstairs bedroom which was Grandfather Redfield's, helped his mother out of her fur coat, and surreptitiously smoothed up those loose ends of her hair which were always escaping from the fussy little comb she wore

below what he privately called her topknot, which he had long considered the ugliest and most commonplace fashion of hair-dressing known to mortal woman. He asked his father a series of assumedly interested questions concerning the journey, and expressed regret that they had had to come through the storm. Altogether, he behaved much better than he felt like behaving, and when they returned to the outer room he punctiliously introduced them to everyone present, with a fair show of filial interest.

The Redfields, one and all, rose to the occasion, as was to have been expected. They could hardly have been delighted to have these people appear without warning, but one never would have guessed it. It had needed but the sight of Felix's stiff coolness to rouse them to more than ordinary warmth. They brought the Rowes into the centre of their circle, and were what Lee Brainard, watching interestedly, designated in her accustomed phraseology as "sweet to them." As for Mrs. Burns, who was also present, she took Mrs. Rowe especially under her wing, sat beside her, and won at once that anxious guest's affection, as, in her lifetime, she had won that of plenty of other embarrassed people. So far as Mrs. Rowe could be set at her ease among such strangers as these, Ellen Burns, who possessed, with the most accomplished social graces, the kindest

of hearts, did so set her. Marcia Redfield, doing her own part with Tracy Rowe on the opposite side of the fireplace, looked across at Cousin Red's lovely wife, appreciating her fully. By all the laws of hospitality these people were to feel themselves heartily welcome, though by all the laws of family life on Christmas Eve, their presence was as little to be desired as that of Felix himself, or even Lee Brainard. When, in all the world, should a family shut everybody out—providing it could do so without unkindness—if not on Christmas Eve? Any other time, all the world might be asked in. But not on Christmas Eve, thought the Redfields. And acted, every one of them, as if nothing could have made them happier.

"Having a tree?" asked Tracy Rowe, by and by, glancing about the room. "If you are, we've—er—brought a little something for it."

"Our tree's in the dining-room," said Jinny, who sat near him. She liked this Mr. Rowe, he seemed so pleasant, full of funny stories; and he seemed to like her, glancing at her and smiling oftener than he did at anybody else. She didn't know it was because her round, bright, freckled little face disconcerted him less than did those of the older, cleverer people, of a type with which he was not familiar. "We're going to have it pretty soon," she confided to him, excitedly.

"That's good—if you don't mind our butting in."

They did mind. It had been in the back of all their thoughts, that the tree should be kept suppressed until these strangers had made their call and gone. All thoughts, that is to say, except those of Mrs. Redfield. She had known at once that she must insist upon the Rowes remaining over night; it was unthinkable that Felix's mother and father should be sent back to their hotel in the city over the heavy roads. It was always possible to accommodate extra guests in this house, by the simple expedient of "doubling up." Rusty and Jinny could give up their room, one of the most attractive upper corner rooms, and one especially desired by the summer boarders. Marcia whispered a word in Rusty's ear, and five minutes later her two daughters quietly left the fireside, one after the other.

Meeting upstairs, Rusty with fresh sheets and pillow-cases and towels on her arm, Jinny with a broom and duster, the suppressed feelings broke loose.

"Such darned luck!" exploded Rusty, hotly. "Any other time but Christmas Eve! And what a pair of people. No wonder their precious Felix is no good."

"I sort of like Mr. Rowe," Jinny admitted, "but I *don't* want to give up our room to him. Why did Mother say our room? Wouldn't the south room

do? Couldn't Nick and Jerry sleep any old place just as well as we can?"

"Much better. But of course their room—I mean the one they're in, with dear Felix occupying Nick's —isn't as good as this one. Oh, well, we needn't be stuffy about it, of course. That poor frightened Mrs. Rowe will be awfully happy to stay near her darling boy. I could kill that Felix for being so just coldly polite to them! Doesn't that just *show* what the man is?"

"It does." Nick stuck his head in at the door, came in and perched on the footrail of the old four poster. "He's a cad, a snob. I say it's all right to keep 'em over night, though I was pretty mad about it at first. We'll show him how a chap ought to act when his family come to see him."

"That's being snobby yourself, old man," criticized Rusty, severely.

"I suppose so. But I don't feel myself drawn to Felix, if you wish it put elegantly, Miss Redfield, and neither do you. Your friend Lee's the only one who seems to take to him, and being from Kentucky I suppose she just does it from force of polite habit; she doesn't really mean it."

"Lee's all right: she's just being decent to him, which is more than the rest of us are. Get off that footrail, please, Mr. Nicholas; I want to tuck in my blankets.—Jinny, don't raise such a dust—

and don't thump so—remember we're just over their heads. This isn't the first time we've had to give up our room to somebody. Anyhow, I'm glad Cousin Red and Cousin Ellen have our one scrumdumtious room. Wasn't it lucky we had them here? They help such a lot with these other people."

"Cousin Ellen's the sweetest thing that ever lived!" Jinny averred. "Please hold that dust-pan, Nicky.—Doesn't she look like a princess beside a—a—not a peasant, exactly, because peasants don't wear awfully fussed up tan silk. Isn't Mrs. Rowe's dress horrid on her?"

"Oh, Cousin Ellen's *clothes!*" Rusty's tone expressed admiration and envy combined. "That perfectly plain gray thing she's wearing to-night, with just those dull blue beads—and her beautiful black hair done so simply—isn't she a picture? I should think Mrs. Rowe'd feel like a dust-mop beside her. As for me, I feel like a—oh, like a little brown hen beside a—lovely gray dove."

"You *look* like a hen." Nick picked her up and set her on his broad shoulder. "A little Rhode Island Red. And you cackle just like one. If women's talk isn't just about the silliest stuff! No matter what they begin to discuss it doesn't take a minute and a half before they get on clothes. You don't hear me going on raving about Cousin Red's clothes, if he *is* a regular fop in that suit he's

wearing, with that tie that—oh, boy! I wonder what that tie cost! And his shoes and socks—I wish I could afford just one pair of shoes like that."

His tone of mimicry didn't deceive them. Well they knew how long Nicky made his clothes wear, after, with the exercise of the best judgment he had, he had bought them at some mark-down sale. He cleaned and pressed them himself, always, and was an expert at it. What they didn't know was how many other fellows' clothes Nick cleaned and pressed at college, at two dollars per. No wonder he was an expert! As for Jerry, though he, too, was "earning his way through," the cleaning and pressing business was one thing he couldn't bring himself to. Anything but that, he couldn't exactly explain why.

And speaking of Jerry, he, too, now put in his head at the door of that upper bedroom.

"Have we got to have that tree with those people looking on?" he queried, a frown between his black brows.

Rusty suddenly turned traitor to them all.

"We are simply awful, common, ordinary creatures," she said, severely, as she shook a fat pillow into its fresh slip, "to be making such a fuss. Look at Father and Mother and Grandfather, and Cousin Ellen and Cousin Red—all behaving like ladies and gentlemen, born and bred. And we sneak off and

act like cross babies. Of course we'll have the tree, and if the Rowes have brought us some terrible presents, as they probably have, we'll accept them nicely, and not—now, listen, children—*not* exchange any meaning looks. It's not the decent thing to do —and it wouldn't be safe, anyway!"

"You're right it wouldn't. Once risk a grin—well, I'd hate to look up and find Cousin Ellen'd caught me at it. Come on, this room looks like a hundred-dollar-a-night suite. Let's go down."

Nick led the way, and the others followed.

It was well that these resolutions had been made, for the gifts that were a little later produced by the guests sorely tried the nerves of all the Redfields. The little lamp Rusty gave her mother was an exquisite thing, but the long magenta silk scarf bedizened with gold which Mrs. Rowe presented to Mrs. Redfield, though it must have cost a pretty sum, was almost unbelievably ugly, and when considered as possible wear by a woman of the recipient's fastidious tastes—— Rusty had to bite back a tendency to hysteria, only conquered by the sight of her mother's perfect poise and the sound of her courteous and appreciative thanks.

"It can be dyed," said Rusty to herself, and kept hold of her shaking facial muscles. As the presentations went on she was conscious that Felix's thin face was streaked with red, and realized, quite sud-

denly, that he was really suffering. For the first time she felt sorry for him. And when his mother proudly bestowed upon him a blue silk lounging robe, embroidered still more heavily than Mrs. Redfield's scarf with Chinese devices in the hues of the rainbow, she was very sorry for him indeed. But she had to admit that after all he was rather game, for the tone in which he thanked his mother was absolutely uncriticizable. And as she looked at the pinched, happy face of Mrs. Rowe, she quite suddenly found herself upon the verge of tears—not tears of mirth but of understanding sympathy. When her own gift from the Rowes appeared, a great feather fan of a brilliant scarlet, probably the last thing on earth that she would ever use, and quite horrible with her coppery hair, she was able to say in a voice which was as sincere in its inspiration as it was in its sound:

"Thank you, Mrs. Rowe. It was mighty kind of you to think of somebody you had never seen." And since this was undeniably true she, as Nick said afterward, "got away with it."

As for Nick and Jerry, the costly neckwear Tracy Rowe had selected for them was not ill-chosen, since the fashion of the day for young men tended toward the extreme. They hated taking the things from a stranger, but there was no way out, and no misunderstanding the kindly intention of the benefac-

tor. And for once in his life Nick had to admit that he was the possessor of a stunning tie which he couldn't possibly have afforded to buy for himself.

Altogether, when the senior Rowes were in their rooms, Felix in his, Lee in hers, and only the family remained downstairs for a moment's conference while Jerry extinguished the last low-burning candle on the tree, Doctor Burns summed it all up by saying, as he dropped into the fire the butt of the expensive black cigar which he had, detesting its flavour, smoked through to the strong and bitter end: "You know, the sight of that little woman in her queer finery, watching her son for his approval as if nothing else mattered to her on earth, was one of the most pathetic things I've ever seen. By George, we've got to batter him into shape somehow, if it's only to satisfy her. As for his father—if I know a man when I see one, he fills the bill. If Felix can turn out worthy of him—though I don't believe, by the way he murders the King's English, that Rowe had even a high-school education—he'll have done something."

"Right you are," said Nick Redfield, solemnly. Jerry nodded. After all, they all knew a man when they saw one, the Redfields.

CHAPTER XVIII

"THEY'RE awful nice people, but they must be pretty poor," said Mrs. Tracy Rowe. She stood in the centre of Rusty's room, looking about her in the lamplight. She spoke in almost a whisper.

"Poor?" Her husband's eyes followed hers, which seemed to be scanning everything. The only thing he had thought about the room, as he came into it, was that it looked as pleasant and homelike as did everything else about the house that he had seen. "Why, this place isn't much like ours, of course, but I shouldn't call it poor. This room reminds me of my old room at home. I like it. And that bed looks good to me."

"Oh, I like it, too," Mrs. Rowe hastened to explain. "It's just that things are plain and kind of shabby —nothing with any style to it. I don't suppose they can afford it."

"Why, this is *country*, Bessie. Small town, anyway. You don't expect the kind of thing *we* have in a place like this—don't want it, I'll say. This takes me back to my boyhood—rag rugs, and four-poster bed, and—say, look at that little washstand! Gee, that's exactly like the one in my mother's room,

where my mother used to drag me to wash me behind the ears!"

He went over to it, chuckling with delight. Rusty had filled the blue-and-white ewer to the brim; it stood inside the bowl. On the stand were a soap dish to match the blue-and-white, and a small white pitcher—the original one of the set had been broken years ago. The rack above was filled with snowy towels, of all sorts—no two alike. Mrs. Rowe noted the fact immediately. She prided herself on her guest-towels, heavily embroidered in colours with the letter R on them all. It wasn't that she was critical, she was only sorry for the poverty these details seemed to her to denote. She had known rag rugs and wooden washstands, herself, and had hated them. It had been wonderful to her to marry a man who in ten years after their marriage had become so prosperous that he could give her velvet rugs and tiled bathrooms. He was proud of being able to give them to her, and to permit her to furnish their home according to her own taste. He had thought he liked that home, too, but somehow, this fresh-smelling country bedroom, with its blue-and-white woven bedspread—which also was like one in his mother's room—and its blue-denim-cushioned, high-backed rocking-chair by the window, attracted him with a peculiar sense of its homelikeness.

He took off his coat and filled the bowl and washed

his hands, for the pure pleasure of using the articles on the stand, in spite of his wife's remonstrance. "For goodness' sake, Tracy, what you washing up *now* for, just as you're going to bed? Mussing up a towel for nothing, when they have to wash their own, most likely!"

"I guess they wouldn't have put so many here if they hadn't expected us to use 'em," he retorted, and smelled enjoyingly of his clean hands as he always liked to do. Tracy Rowe was fond of soap and water, and looked it. His wife didn't quite look it. He had noticed several times during the evening how her gray hair straggled just above the back of her neck, in contrast to the ordered trimness of the other women's heads. But she was a good woman, Bessie was—he knew that; and she *was* clean, if she didn't always look it. Just a little careless, that was all. Well, never mind.

"They're nice people," Mrs. Rowe repeated, in her whisper, as she began to undress, laying her necklace, her breastpin, her watch, and her bracelet upon the ruffled muslin cover of the high-topped bureau which in her mind she designated as a "funny old-fashioned dresser." She opened her hand-bag and took out many other articles for the night, until the bureau-top was well covered. "They seemed to like the things we brought, didn't they?"

"I guess they did. You couldn't tell—people like them—they'd be polite, anyway. Doctor Burns liked his cigars, though—you bet those were good cigars. He made one last a long time, the way a smoker does when he hates to get to the end and thinks he'd better not have another."

"Felie liked his dressing gown—I should think he would! Do you really think he looks better, Tracy?"

"Better? Of course he looks better. Why, I should say he weighs a good ten pounds more than he did when he left home."

"But he acts just about as down-hearted as ever, don't you think so?"

"Nonsense, Bessie; it just seemed so to you because all the rest of 'em were so bright and lively. That little Rusty—*she's* a case! She took my eye. I liked her better than the tall girl that they said was visiting 'em—forget her name. Those boys are nice fellows—and keen!—well, I should say. I'd like to see Felix answer up the way they do."

"Tracy! They're well and he's sick!"

"Well, I should think he'd *get* well, living with people like that."

"The young folks aren't here all the time—they're just home for vacation. The rest of the time it's just the father and mother and that deaf old man."

"Well, they ought to be good company. That Mrs. Redfield—she's a wonderful woman, Bessie.

I liked her best of all. She *knows* something. And the Doctor's wife—jiminy crickets!—she's pretty nice to look at. I didn't get to talk to her much. She seemed to spend all her time on you."

"Oh, of course you admired the women! Men always notice them more than they do other men."

This was a note which Tracy Rowe knew must not be struck. He came up behind his wife as she stood at the bureau looking into the mirror. His ruddy face showed over her thin shoulder, his clear blue eyes looked into her clouded brown ones. Bessie Rowe had been a pretty girl when he married her; he had often said to himself that if she hadn't worried so much about everything under the sun she would still be a pretty woman. There were lines between her eyebrows, lines about her mouth, which had a despondent expression except when she smiled, lines beginning to show under her chin.

"I noticed you, too," he said. "I thought you looked fine in that dress you've got on. It's a nicer one than Mrs. Redfield's. I"— he hesitated—"I don't know's you could do your hair any different, but I thought maybe if you didn't frizz it quite so much——"

"Tracy Rowe! *Frizz* it! Why, everybody has their hair waved these days. Those women both had lots of hair—they could do it plainer. Mine's come out so, with my ill health and all, I *have* to curl

it, to make more of it. I don't say I wouldn't like to look like that Mrs. Burns, but everybody can't look like that, Tracy. You——"

"Now, see here, little woman—see here!" Tracy patted her shoulder. "I don't want you any different from what you are. I picked you out and I stay by my choice. Say, did you notice that deaf old man? He couldn't hear much of what we said, but he certainly did keep his eyes on everybody. I'll bet a lot of thinkin' goes on in the back of *his* head. And the blind one—say, I felt sorry for him, didn't you? Think of it! There's trouble for you. I should think when Felix looks at him, he'd think his own troubles aren't much."

"He's a middle-aged man—it can't matter so much for him. Felix ought to be like that Nick—just full of life. I didn't see much pass between those boys and Felix—I don't believe he gets along very well with them."

"Oh, well, they're younger than he is. You must remember, Bessie, Felix is getting along toward thirty—it's time he sobered down."

"Sobered down! I should think he was sobered down. Why, that blind man smiled more than Felie did—Felie hardly smiled at all."

"Well, Bessie,"—Tracy Rowe moved away, hanging his coat over the back of a chair, and sitting down to unlace his shoes—"if you're bound to look on the

dark side of things, even when we've got here and found how well Felix is fixed and what a good chance he has to get well——"

Hardly listening, Bessie looked about her. She walked over to one of the windows, raised the shade, and gazed out into the night. Then her attention fell upon the window frame, upon which her hand rested. It was old and loose in its joints, and the cold wind came through; but this was not the worst. By the sign of a little iron pin which stuck out at the side of the sash, she saw that the window, if raised, could be held in place only by the use of this pin, attached to a spring. Anything to her more indicative of old-time discomfort could hardly have met her eye.

"Just look at this, Tracy," she whispered. He came over to her. "This house is so old they have to keep the windows up with these things. I haven't seen one since I was a child. I don't see how Felie can be comfortable in such a place, used to modern improvements, the way he is."

But Tracy Rowe was silently laughing, and fingering the iron catch with delighted interest. "Just like they were in my old home," he whispered back. "Cripes, I'd like to stay here a month!"

Staying a month, or even two days, was out of the question. Next morning with his breakfast Tracy Rowe received a telegram from the home office.

One of those big business "deals" with which his life was for ever concerned made his immediate presence necessary. With a sigh he packed his bag. But before he and his wife went he had a short talk with Marcia Redfield. With his shrewd insight he had recognized that not even Felix's doctor knew quite as much about him as did she, who saw him every day.

"It looks to me," he said to her, thinking again as he sat before her what a lucky fellow his boy was to be permitted to stay under the same roof with her, "as if my son was a lot better. But there's something queer about him, even yet. I don't know's I get the right slant on him, but he acts to me—has all along—as if he's got something on his mind. I don't know what it could be, unless it's kind of unpleasant recollections of what he saw over there in war-time. But it seems as if they ought to fade out by this time. I wish"—he spoke very earnestly, and she saw how much this son of his was to him—"you'd tell me exactly how you feel about him. You can speak out to me. I don't know's you'd better to his mother—she kind of gets things in her head a little different from the way they really are, and they bother her. But you needn't be afraid to tell me anything. I'm used"—he straightened his broad shoulders as if to brace himself—"to bearing up under 'most any kind of thing."

Marcia answered him at once, and in her direct,

friendly way, which from his first seeing her had called out his confidence in her: "I don't think there's anything for you to bear up under just now, Mr. Rowe," she said, "though I know you could do it if there were. And I'm going to tell you honestly that I think you may be right about there being something on your son's mind. His peculiar indifference to everything around him, his listlessness, his silence, have all given me that impression. If there is, we can only wait and hope that the time will come when we can help him. The thing we are trying to do for him here is to establish his belief in us, and his liking for us, so that if what he needs is to get this burden—if there is a burden of some sort—off his mind, he will come to that point naturally."

"I wish he could have come to me," said Tracy Rowe, wistfully.

"I wish he could, Mr. Rowe." Mrs. Redfield's voice was full of understanding. "But you will be glad if in any way, or by any means, we get the desired result. I have this conviction about your son, that—as Father Redfield says—there's a real man behind this graven image of one, and some day he'll come to life. When he does——"

"When he does," said the father of the image, a slight vibration in his voice which spoke of strong feeling, "I'll throw up my hat so high it'll catch on the nearest telegraph pole."

CHAPTER XIX

"WHAT *is* it about these people that makes them interesting?"

Lee Brainard asked the question of Felix Rowe. The winter holiday was almost over, and the two had had more to do with each other than Felix had had with any member of the Redfield household. This was mostly because of Lee herself, who was accustomed to carry with her any man in whom she became interested, because she knew how to do it. Felix, as usual following the line of least resistance, had found it easier to yield to Lee's suggestions of walks and talks than to oppose them. Lee felt herself more than justified in taking Felix out every day because she had been told that exercise in the open air was what he needed. To say that she enjoyed these contacts with the "Prince of Denmark," as she gaily designated him to Rusty—and even to himself, when he seemed more than usually sombre —was putting it mildly.

"*Are* they interesting?" Felix put the counter question. The pair were walking at a mild pace out of the village upon the state highway. There was little snow just now, and the sun's rays were

rapidly removing what was left from the last heavy storm.

"Don't you think they are? Of course, as we've said before, they're unsophisticated, in spite of all the evidences of education and real culture. They're essentially small-town people, nice as they are. How can they help it?—having grown up on a farm, and never having travelled or known any distinguished men and women. Going away to college doesn't make citizens of the world of such people. But they *are* interesting, and I know you think so, too. Just *why* are they?"

"You tell me. I'm not up to thinking it out. I'll admit they're the sort of family one doesn't expect to find in such a place. I haven't spent any time analyzing them."

"Of course you have, if you've only done it subconsciously. I was so interested in Rusty at college I begged the invitation to come home with her. There's something about her amazing energy, and her quick-as-lightning intuitions, that attracts a languid person like me immensely. I admire her so—and envy her so! Nothing seems too difficult for her to undertake. It seemed to me if I could see her home I might get at the source of her vitality. I'm not sure that she understands people like me at all, in spite of her cleverness. She hasn't much sympathy with lack of energy—I'm positive of that.

The idea of breakfast in bed, unless one were actually ill, would positively shock her. Whereas I—why, I was brought up on having breakfast in bed! And you—I'm sure"—she looked smilingly at Felix, pacing slowly beside her, his hands in his overcoat pockets and his soft hat drawn well down over his brow to keep the sun out of his eyes—"would have it every morning in the world, if you weren't too kind to put these busy people to the trouble."

Felix nodded, grimly. "I not only would have it in bed, but having had it I'd stay there. I'm as poor a stick as that."

Lee's glance was very sympathetic. "Of course you would, you tired dear, but not because you're a poor stick. You've been very ill, and your recovery is slow. I wish—I wonder if you'll mind, Mr. Rowe, if I tell you that I feel I do understand about that better than most people who come in contact with you—much better, perhaps, than any of the Redfields. And—I'm so—*so* sorry!"

"That's very good of you," Felix replied. Not much of an answer!

She was feeling her way carefully. Impossible to know just how far she could go in trying to gain his interest. The more difficult he was to know, the more he attracted her. He possessed what she considered, in spite of the gaunt cheek it showed, a most well-cut profile, and each time she looked at it

she became more enamoured of it. The dark eyes, so encircled still by shadows, irresistibly fascinated her. She imagined herself winning his interest, his confidence, his love—if he were capable of so strong an emotion. She visualized herself being married to him, sailing away with him on a long voyage, at the end of which he would return, the most delightful companion in the world, and live with her down in her empty Kentucky home. Sentiment was powerful with Lee Brainard; she had gone to college—a great co-educational school—primarily in the hope of making a marriage. And now, after many affairs of her susceptible heart, she was finding herself all but infatuated with this invalid, who seemed to have nothing to give any woman beyond the right to nurse him and strive to please him.

Felix himself was but slightly interested in Lee. She was a charming girl, and he recognized her absorption in him. In so far as this filled up a number of otherwise empty hours he welcomed it; but he wouldn't turn his hand over to keep it. Queer, too, he admitted to himself, for Lee was an extremely attractive girl, and always so beautifully dressed that she filled the eye with satisfaction. The trouble was, he supposed, that he knew her type too well.

Swinging along toward them, down the road, now appeared two figures, one of which Lee recognized at

a long distance. That was Rusty, by her gray coat, her black hat, and a certain peculiar marching way of walking, as if she were advancing to the inspiring music of an invisible band. A difficult step to keep up with, for Lee, even though she was half a head taller than Rusty. Evidently not difficult for the long legs of the man beside her, who kept pace with ease, though not attempting to match the shorter step of the slim little figure which reached hardly above his shoulder.

"Here comes Rusty now," Lee announced. "See her rush—that's what she's always doing. That's not Nick nor Jerry beside her; they're not as tall as that. What a pair of tongs he is! They both walk as if they were going to a fire."

The pair came nearer with rapidity. Both Felix and Lee were scanning them closely as they approached, for they were absorbed in talk, noting nothing of their surroundings. The man's long arms waved like flails with a sudden gesture, in reply to which Rusty's gloved fist beat into her palm the emphasis of her words. When but a rod or two of distance separated the two couples, it could be seen that the owner of the efficient arms and legs was a sandy-haired individual with keen eyes, a pointed nose, an expressive, determined mouth, and a dominant chin, who looked as if he would be a success on a platform impressing his views upon a

mob of strikers. He was decidedly plain of face, and Lee gave him but one look. Rusty herself was better worth observation, it occurred to her, for seldom had Lee seen her appear to be so entertained by a companion. Rusty had never seemed to care a picayune for the young men by whom she was surrounded, was accustomed to refuse many more invitations than she accepted, and when she was occasionally encountered in the company of some fellow student was quite as apt to seem gaily indifferent to him as pleased with him. But now—Lee had caught her friend actually looking up at a man as if she were stimulated to an exceeding degree by the contact. As for the man himself, if he was not in the same case, then two people were never encountered who were interested in each other—or in the subject they were discussing—to a point which excluded everybody else in the world. Lee wondered which it was.

Suddenly Rusty glanced ahead and saw the two others. She cut herself short, murmured a word of warning, and the next minute the four people were face to face. Rusty stopped—everybody stopped—and she presented Mr. Carter. Mr. Carter pulled off a gray slouch hat considerably the worse for the weather it had seen, Felix's sleek dark head was bared to the December winds, and Lee Brainard smiled charmingly from behind her sables.

"Mr. Carter is the editor of our village newspaper," Rusty said.

"Fine to be able to do your editing on the road, Mr. Carter," Felix drawled.

"Great. It's the only way to get a breath of fresh air into it," Rusty's lanky friend responded.

"Oh, do you have an Eastville daily?" Lee inquired. "I haven't seen it, I'm afraid."

"It doesn't exist—as yet," Carter admitted.

"But it will, some day," Rusty declared, and used that same gesture of beating a fist into a palm, which was a favourite one with her in moments of eloquence. "Meanwhile, the weekly isn't w-e-a-k-l-y: it's robust. It suffered a long period of exhaustion before the present editor put a new seat in the wobbly swivel chair and sat down at the battered old desk. But now, it's very much alive and to be reckoned with. We'll tell you all about it sometime. I believe Mr. Carter has to be getting back to that desk."

The two pairs of people moved on, in opposite directions. When they were out of hearing distance one pair jumped back into the discussion they had been holding, without a word of comment upon the two they had just encountered. As for the other pair——

"Did you ever see such a homely man?" Lee queried. "But he looked bright enough to be the editor of anything."

"A homely face with a bright eye in it is the first desideratum in an editor," Felix responded. "I never knew a 'pretty' man to have brains enough to run any kind of a paper. The one we've just met certainly ought to be able to qualify."

He didn't know that there was a note of envy in his voice. This village editor was the first man he had met since he came to Eastville, the look in whose face had stirred within him something that had long lain dormant. A man who looked as if he were doing something he wanted to do, and doing it with all his might!

CHAPTER XX

"MOTHER, I want to check up on you, if you don't mind. Now's the time to do it. I don't get a chance often, with this mob around."

Marcia Redfield's elder son, Nicholas, sat down determinedly astride a chair in her kitchen, and eyed her over his folded arms resting upon the chair back. Mrs. Redfield, paring apples with a quick, skilful slipping of her sharp little knife under their skins, looked over at him, smiling. She met the alert gaze she knew so well and loved to see, which told her that Nick's active brain was working to some purpose.

"All right, Nicky. Come out with it. How do you want to 'check up' on me? Am I not behaving properly?"

"Only too properly. You're getting the big end of the duty proposition. To come out with it, as you so cordially invite me—I don't like this taking in a winter boarder of the sit-on-his-thumbs variety. If this Rowe were any good at all he'd begin to show it by now. How long has he got to stay? It's like having the Old Man of the Sea camping on your chest. He casts a gloom over everything. That

play we had for him—I don't think he got it at all. If he hasn't improved any yet, he isn't going to. And I say it's time to fire him, and give you a rest before May and the first importation of those people who begin to write for their old rooms for the summer. I had it in for Cousin Red for sending him here in the beginning, but I understood it was only for a few weeks. He's been here nearly three months, and he seems settled in for the rest of his miserable life. Why let 'em put it over on you, Mother?"

Mrs. Redfield selected a particularly bright red apple and tossed it to him. "Nobody's imposing on me, dear," she said. "I'm much interested in Felix's case. And he is gaining—he really is. Some day he's going to take a sudden jump of improvement and reward us. He's very little trouble, really. Don't bother your red head about him. What next?"

"*That's* next—and some more. I don't like the fellow. I don't like having him in the house. I don't like having him in my room. Why should you, who have everything on your hands already, take on this new liability?"

Mrs. Redfield looked at her son with an amused light of understanding in her eyes. There was as deep a scowl on Nick's brow as she had ever seen on Felix's own.

"Jealous, Nicky?" she said, with the hint of a laugh on her fine lips.

"Oh, I suppose so." The scowl did not smooth out. "I could stand it, if you were getting anywhere with him, but I can't see that you are. You say he's gaining. Tell me how. He comes down the last of all to breakfast, and sits through without saying anything, unless this Kentucky Lee gets something out of him. He acts like an actor, to me. I can't believe in such a pose of indifference. I never see him doing a blessed thing between breakfast and dinner. Maybe he goes out for a walk between dinner and supper, if the weather's good enough for him. How he stands himself——" Nick broke off with an inarticulate sound of disgust.

"He *can't* stand himself, Nick—and that's the most hopeful symptom. He's getting to the point where he won't stand himself any longer, and then something will happen. In the meantime, don't be guilty of failing to do what you can, while you're here, to give him a fair show. Infinite patience is necessary with such cases as his, and I'm very confident that in the end he'll reward us. Just remember that a full-blooded, red-headed fellow like Nick Redfield is just naturally prejudiced against any reticent young man with a pale face, and don't—well, son, don't be a bully!"

Nick stared, then threw back his head and roared, exposing to view a mouthful of the whitest, strongest teeth which ever bit into an apple with the gusto of the youthful appetite. "Mother," he said, when his face had become composed again, "it's worth striking sparks from you to hear you come back. Do you realize that you're not the stereotyped sort of a mother at all? Any other woman but you would have said, 'You must be kind to the young man, dear.' But you rip out, 'Don't be a bully, son!' You get me—you always did. Being a bully to Felix is just what I'd enjoy being. I have to restrain myself from bolting into his room in the morning, stripping the bedclothes off from his shrinking form, and pulling him to a standing position in the middle of the floor. I——"

"Why don't you do it?" inquired Mrs. Redfield, composedly quartering her pared apples, her strong white fingers making rapid work of it. "*That's* not bullying: it's treating a man like a brother. I've no doubt it would give much less offense than your method of talking around him at the table, ignoring him, or else bringing on a discussion which palpably hits him in one way or another. I've been rather ashamed of you several times this vacation, Nicky. Your tongue is sometimes quicker than your sense of fairness."

"Well, that certainly is a hard shot," Nick ac-

knowledged, eyeing his mother ruefully. "I thought my sense of fairness was——"

"Yes, you pride yourself on it, as most college men do. And as a rule you possess it. But the attitude you've had toward our patient ever since you came, my dear, has been one of only partially suppressed contempt. That isn't good for you, whatever it is for him. There are only a few days left. For the rest of the time suppose you try treating him like an ex-soldier who won at least two medals for distinguished service, which as a newspaper correspondent he wasn't expected to do. As nearly as we can get it—no, don't look at me that way, Nick—*he* didn't tell us, but his father told your father, as fathers will—he ran many risks, not only to get news but to save lives. He didn't carry arms, but he carried wounded men, and he took the place of more than one killed ambulance driver, jumped into his seat and drove the car up into the thick of things. And so on——"

"And how did this news get back?" Nick questioned, skepticism in his intent eye.

"By means of competent observers—*not* by Felix's own story," declared his mother firmly. "Nick——" The two faced each other, eye to eye. Then there fell a minute's silence. At the end of it Nick put his arm about Mrs. Redfield's shoulders.

"All right—you win," he admitted. "It's hard

for me to give up a prejudice—that's my red head, I suppose."

"People with red heads," said Marcia Redfield, "have a way of thinking the colour of their hair excuses them for what might be called red-hair-trigger tempers. Like the rest of us they have to behave themselves decently, even if they do feel like blowing up over everything."

Nick was grinning again. "How about Cousin Red?" he inquired, "speaking of red-hair-trigger tempers.—That's a good one!—Hasn't he blown up over everything all his days, and don't we like him all the better for it?"

When Marcia Redfield smiled, her face was one of splendour. "We do," she admitted. "But Red's temper is like the dynamite that blasts out the rocks—the hole it makes is almost always a hole that is going to be of use. A foundation can be built on it. While our tempers blow up bridges that were needed, and the excavations we make are like shell-holes."

"Oh, thunder!" exclaimed her son. "Not yours, whatever mine do. Your hair isn't red."

"My temper used to be," declared Mrs. Redfield. "If I've learned more discretion in the use of the explosive, that's only due to contact with your father. By the way, son, he's been listening to the table talk with some distress at the turn it has taken since his

children came home. 'I'm going to tell Nick and Jerry,' he said last night, 'not to make the mistake of underestimating the enemy's strength. If Felix ever does come to himself, I've a notion he could write a satirical article on hitting a man when he is down that would make them crumple up.'"

"Dad said that?" Nick was regarding his mother in amazement. "My quiet old Dad, just listening in?"

"Your quiet, wise Dad, just listening in. Since he lost his eyesight, Nicky, his ears have grown doubly sharp. You may be sure he never misses an inflection now. And Lincoln Redfield,"—her voice deepened in a way which warned Nick that something was coming to which he had to listen—"though he never went to college, has that sense of fairness we were talking of, which, to my mind, is one of the first marks of a gentleman, born and bred, whether he has grown up on a farm or in a palace."

"Whew-w!" Nick's face was scarlet to the ears. "By Jiminy, Mother, you *can* hit hard. If I deserve it, that makes it all the worse. Of course I didn't mean—we haven't thought—why, I'll admit I *have* been despising this chap, Felix, but I thought I had a right. His darned indifferent ways—do you call 'em those of a gentleman? Now, honest injun, *do* you?"

"What has that to do with the case?"

Hands plunged deep in pockets, Nick took a turn across the room. "Nothing, I suppose. And of course what you tell me about his war service goes a good way. He's sick—or has been—sick of mind, anyway. It's just that for the life of me I can't see why he won't brace up now."

"By the time you come home in June," said Mrs. Redfield, with a peculiar note of confidence in her quiet voice, "he will have braced up. And when he does, as your father says, he will be capable of meeting his critics on their own ground. Do you want to feel, then, that you did what you could, in the short time you were here at Christmas, to keep him down? Or that you put a shoulder under his arm when he needed it?"

"I thought," said Nick, gruffly, "the idea was not to baby him."

"The idea most certainly is not to baby him. But neither is it to knock his crutch away. Suppose we don't talk about it any more. Think it over, dear. You *have* that sense of fairness we spoke of, and I know it. Let it tell you what to do."

And Mrs. Redfield set her saucepan on the stove, poured water over her apples, shut them in with a tin cover, and untied her apron.

"I have a half hour now, when I can read to your father," she said.

"I'll read to him," said Nick. "I'll read to him—the good old scout. You go do something else you want to do, not something you ought to do, just for a change."

Suddenly he put both arms around her, with just such a boyish hug as he had given her since he was old enough to give hugs at all. He laid his cheek against hers. "You're great stuff!" he whispered, and let her go and dashed out of the room, whistling to take the edge off his sudden but excusable burst of sentiment.

CHAPTER XXI

PLACK, plack—plack-plack-plack-plack! As he came downstairs on a morning several days after Christmas, Felix recognized a familiar sound. A typewriter—evidently an old and rattly one—was going at full speed. That sound sent his thoughts jumping back to crowded newspaper offices, hooded lights over desks where men of all types pounded out their news stories, and the whole atmosphere was one of rush and strain. He had loved it—once—though the thought of it now made him wince. He had written his last copy—he was sure of that.

The operator at this particular little old bangy machine proved to be Rusty Redfield. Her fingers were flying over the keys at a terrific speed; sheet after sheet was run through and dropped upon the little pile at the side of her table. Felix sat down quietly in his accustomed corner by the window which looked over the snowbound garden, and watched her above the top of his magazine. As she sat there, oblivious of everything about her, she was the incarnation of inspired industry. It was evident that whatever was her subject she was full of it—couldn't get the words down fast enough. Well, he

knew that mood—knew that when one's brain is working like that, something comes of it. How long it was since anything had come of *his* brain!

Rusty had an interesting profile—it was sturdily attractive rather than delicately so. Her coppery hair, slightly curly, was beautifully arranged. Her strong white neck suggested that she was possessed of staying powers, could keep right on banging that old machine all day, if necessary. A little frown of concentration between her well-marked eyebrows testified to the fact that when Rusty worked she worked.

She pulled out the last sheet, shifted them all into order, and began to read them, stopping now and then to put in a correction or an interlineation. Twice she dashed her pencil through a half paragraph with a determination which Felix recognized as the mark of the writer who has passed that stage of the amateur when he treasures every word once put upon paper and can spare none. When her task was done she slipped a clip upon the sheets and went to the telephone. It was in the dining-room, but the door was open and Felix could hear her. He didn't think she had noticed that he was downstairs at all. But in this he was mistaken.

He didn't try not to listen to the conversation. It proved more interesting than one-sided telephone talks usually are.

"The *Arrow* office? . . . Oh, Andy, I've done the article I promised you. I'll bring it over. How much more space do you need to have filled? Yes—another editorial—and what?—A two-column article of general interest—original! Yes, I understand—you won't use A. P. stuff unless you have to. Did you get somebody to cover that Country Club meeting? *All* sick? Gracious—you *are* out of luck! Well, I'll do what I can and have it over by three, if possible. Yes, of course I understand the importance of this issue—a lot hangs on it. All right—don't mention it! Good-bye."

Rusty came back into the big sitting-room. She glanced from her father to her grandfather, seeming to be considering. Then she looked at Felix, and came over to him. She drew up a chair in front of him and began—out of a clear sky. Felix had laid down his magazine and was rising, in his languid way, but she waved him down.

"Mr. Rowe, you're an old newspaper man, I've been told."

Felix nodded. "I'm not one now," he said. Something about Rusty's way of beginning boded trouble.

"But you have the trick still, of course. It can't be lost."

"I most certainly have lost it, Miss Redfield. I don't even wish to get it back."

Rusty fixed her eyes on that portion of the garden which could be seen through the window, and addressed her hearer in a firm, cool tone of business, without a particle of persuasiveness in it. Felix had never had her so near him before, nor in so clear a light, revealing every detail of her face. He had wondered several times if her apple-cheek colouring were not, like that of most girls in these days—like Lee Brainard's most certainly—the result of clever make-up; he saw now, past a doubt, that it was not. He could detect even a few tiny freckles on her nice little nose and over the upper part of her cheeks—the result of a Christmas vacation spent as much as possible in the open air.

"We have a little village weekly newspaper," she said, "which has been published in the same rickety old building for seventy-five years. Grandfather Redfield once owned it and edited it. After he sold it and left it, it went all to pieces under a perfect idiot who edited it with the shears and a paste-pot —you know the sort of man. Then, two years ago, a determined chap by the name of Carter—you remember him?—you met him on the road with me the other day—came along and bought it, with just all he had. Andy Carter grew up in Eastville, along with the rest of us, but he'd gone away for his education, and he'd had quite a lot of newspaper experience since college days. Well, it's been an awful pull

to get the circulation back up to a paying basis, but he's just about done it, when along comes a fire, night before last, and partly burns him out. Publication day is to-morrow. The press was saved, but a heap of copy was burned—special copy, for the first issue of the New Year. He'd been advertising for weeks a new departure—a whole new make-up—to begin the year with. He'd sent for special articles from two or three quite distinguished writers—and paid for them. And so on. You can see it's a crisis. He can't just use any old thing after telling everybody what a great sheet it was to be. He wired two writers for duplicates of their copy, but got back one answer—'Original destroyed. Cannot reproduce.' The other writer didn't even answer his wire."

And now Rusty brought her glance back from the garden to bear straight upon Felix.

"Being a trained newspaper man," she said, "your mind has jumped ahead of my story and you know what I want of you. Will you do it—to help out a chap in trouble?"

Felix's brows were drawn together in a heavy scowl. His dark glance met hers only for a moment and then dropped to the floor.

"Write a special article for your weekly newspaper?" he said. "My dear Miss Redfield, you don't know what you ask. I'm sorry for your friend's dilemma, but it's quite out of the question."

"Why?" asked Rusty, simply.

"There are three reasons, if you insist upon having them. The first is—that I haven't written such an article for more than three years. The second is that I'm not fit—not able—to do it. The third is that—if you wish me to be frank—I don't want to."

Rusty rose. "Of course, the last is the only real reason. I understand perfectly," she said. And walked away.

Felix's cheek flushed. He got up and went slowly after her. "I'm sorry to be disobliging, but—you must realize that the third reason I gave you is the logical result of the first two. If I *had* been writing, and if I were fit to write, I should want to oblige you—and your friend Mr. Carter. As it is—it's not possible for me to want to—and I don't."

Rusty turned upon him. "You don't want to get well, then, do you?"

His brow grew darker yet. He was silent, but she could see his hand tremble before he quickly plunged it into a pocket, out of sight. Finally—"I have given up hope," he said stiffly, "that I shall ever get well. I've no doubt at all that it's my indifference that stands in the way—but I can't help the indifference. If anything could have stirred my ambition, it would have been the sight and sound of your typewriter for the last hour. It—didn't—in the least."

Rusty stood looking at him for a minute, thinking out an idea which had come to her quite suddenly. She had heard all this before, about Felix's lack of ambition to get well. Both her mother and Doctor Burns had explained the somewhat complex case to her. Quite unexpectedly to Felix she smiled—she had been looking like a little thunder-cloud during his refusal.

"All right," she said. "But I wonder if you would be so kind as to listen to the thing I've just written. I don't usually force my efforts on anybody, but there's a reason why I think you might be just a little interested in this effort to fill Mr. Carter's space—not too unworthily. May I read it to you?"

Felix bowed, formally, as was his custom. He never relaxed into informal manners in this house. "Certainly," he said—and wished himself a thousand miles away.

Rusty got her manuscript, sat down near Felix's chair again, slipped off her clips, and began, in a perfectly un-self-conscious way, to read. It might have been anybody's article but her own which she was submitting, impersonally, to an editor to fill up space.

He didn't want to listen; he expected little of this young woman, bright as he saw her to be. A clever, youthful essay on college life, or a story picked

up on the street, such as women newspaper writers turn off by the yard—this would be the best that she could do; a mere "filler" for a column which must be padded out in a hurry. . . . But—what was this? Something which couldn't be just defined, but which in the first sentence, the first paragraph, arrested his attention.

The subject was "*What Do You Read?*" It was addressed to the people who live in the small town, in the country, in the great middle-class household—possibly in what is termed by some the "lower middle class." It was meant for those who do not do much reading, except of the weekly newspaper, the cheap magazine, the popular third-rate book.

Well, Rusty Redfield had told them what she thought of them—told them in such straightforward terms and withal such artful putting of the case that they had no choice but to listen. It was impossible to imagine any reader of ordinary intelligence, who had once started upon that article, throwing it down, uninterested. It was not over anybody's head, yet it did not descend to the level of those who must have obvious things made clear by diagrams and charts. It sparkled with wit, it appealed by common sense, it convinced by logic, and it challenged by the setting of an ideal which even an ordinary mind could look toward and covet. In other words, the article was the type of work which Felix Rowe was

bound to recognize as so far above the average that it deserved high praise.

When she had finished, Rusty put the clip back upon her pages without looking up. Her cheeks were a trifle flushed, but her manner was cool enough.

Felix spoke; the words seemed to be wrung from him. "That's great stuff, Miss Redfield. Of course you know that."

"Do I? If it's all right, it's because I want so much to be of use to Andy Carter. Now I'm going to get Grandfather to talk to me about the old days of the paper—it ought to make some corking copy if he's in the vein at all. I'm not a rapid stenographer, but Grandfather talks slowly, and I think I can get him—mostly."

She went over to old Mr. Redfield's corner. Felix, now a good deal taken out of himself, in spite of himself, looked on and listened while Rusty drew the old man out. It didn't take long to wake him up and get him going upon this favourite subject, and presently Rusty's pencil was hard put to it to follow the speech of the ex-owner and editor of the *Arrow*. As he warmed he got up and began slowly to pace the floor, and Felix found himself listening with amazement to the way the veteran was formulating his sentences. They were vigorous, clear-cut sentences which exactly expressed his thought, the working of a brain so far from senile

that it seemed that of a man of only mature years rather than of one the best of whose life was over.

And now Rusty's cheeks were flushed indeed, as her pencil set down her dots and dashes, with their fine shadings which indicated all the difference between one meaning and another. She had equipped herself with three well-sharpened pencils, but as the task progressed Felix recognized her need of more. He got up and came over and put careful points upon the two she had used, and when she dropped the third one, gave that a fine point also. Over her shoulder he glanced at her page, noting with approval that her method was the one he had used, generally considered the best known.

All the time he was listening to a fascinating history of that village paper, with its owner's struggles to give it place and position and influence in an indifferent community. Inconceivable to a young newspaper man who had known only the great city dailies of the present, with their splendidly adequate equipment of presses and workmen and trained writers, were old Mr. Redfield's vivid tales of the hand-presses of his day, constantly breaking down. He described the slow setting of type by hand, and gave an idea of the innumerable unforeseen happenings and accidents which meant bringing the paper out on time each week—a feat which called not only for wit and resource but for endurance. "We got

out our paper with a pair of pliers and a hank of wire," was one of his sentences, "and when the old press broke down again we threw away our pen and made a dash for our screw-driver—which at such times was often the mightier of the two." Why, the old man, thought Felix, had the style and method of the modern columnist.

"Well, Rusty,"— Mr. Redfield paused suddenly, seeming to come back out of the past with a leap to the present—"perhaps that's about all you can handle for this time—must be a couple of columns. Of course I could go on pouring out these reminiscences, but maybe Carter's readers won't care for 'em as I do. They'll be fillers, that's all."

"They're perfectly splendid, Granddaddy." Rusty's tired fingers set down her last hieroglyphics, and her blunting pencil paused. "I know Andy Carter will want some more, another issue. This probably is all I can type before three, when I promised him I'd have the copy in. Thank you a thousand times, and now I'll get this into shape in a hurry."

She sat down again at her machine, propping up her notebook. She began to work, but now things went slowly. Rusty was looking from her shorthand page to the sheet upon her machine, and her eyes also followed her fingers upon the keyboard. The watcher saw at once that she was not a skilful typist, fast though she could put her work through when

she was not copying. She could not read her own notes and type them without looking at her keyboard, as the modern office stenographer does. This was a serious handicap, as Felix well knew. Somehow it annoyed him to watch this waste of time. And finally he got up again and went over to her. "Would you care to have me type this as you read it?" he asked, and she couldn't know what a superhuman effort the offer took. He could hardly believe his own ears as he heard himself making it. "Of course we could get it down twice as fast that way.

"Oh, twice!" agreed Rusty, trying not to show the little leap of exultation her heart made at this first —the very first—concession she had won from the strange person beside her. "I didn't learn the touch system, as I should—just picked up typing by myself—never expected to use it much. So it bothers me when I come to copying my own notes."

She jumped up, put her chair into position, hurriedly oiled the typewriter's bearings, and said carelessly: "It's not a very easy touch, but it does fair work," and took her seat beside it. Felix sat down before the machine, studied the keyboard for a minute, and sat waiting. It seemed a thousand years since he had fingered type-keys, and as if he must have forgotten the arrangement of the letters. To his surprise he found he hadn't. His pulses were pounding. By the Lord Harry, he actually didn't

know whether he could write three consecutive words!

Rusty gave him no time to think about it—by some divining power she knew better than that. She plunged into the first paragraph.

"The newspaper office of fifty years ago, in this village, was a place where the weekly paper was born of the hardest labour known to man. It had been conceived by a visionary young fellow out of his wits with the effort to use them; his old hand-press travailed with the pangs of the birth; and those who stood about waiting for the signs of life shook their heads and prophesied with one accord, 'The child can't live.' But it did live. And this is the story of the diet it was fed upon, and the struggle it had for its existence when everybody seemed to want it to die."

Does one ever forget that which he has thoroughly learned? Though he hadn't known whether his fingers could find the keys, Felix began with the same sure touch as that with which he had pounded out two thousand words an hour in the crowded newspaper office, concentrating furiously to get away from the dozen other machines clacking in the same room. In two minutes he was setting down the words which Rusty could hardly read from her notes fast enough to set him the pace he was able to keep. And at the end of the hour Grandfather

Redfield's impromptu discourse was ready for the typesetter, and Rusty was saying with an air of assurance:

"You'll go with me to take it over to Mr. Carter, won't you? It's only a mile, and it will do us good to get out, after such a race."

For an instant Felix hesitated. He was tired, no doubt of that. His impulse was to refuse, and go upstairs to lie down upon his bed and ponder upon his late performance. But somehow—again something not of his own volition seemed to act for him.

"I believe I will," he said.

Curiosity about that newspaper office, now that he had in a remote way put himself in touch with it by typing copy for its columns, was what was moving him. A country newspaper office—he knew nothing of them. No reason why he shouldn't see one—under rather unusual conditions—after a fire. Slowly he got himself into his ulster, with a heavy silk muffler inside, drew on a pair of fur-lined gloves, pulled his soft hat well down over his brows, after his custom, and followed Rusty, who in the twinkling of an eye had made herself ready for the walk, out into the December afternoon. He didn't know it, but his reluctant feet had touched the first shallow waters of his Rubicon!

CHAPTER XXII

ANDREW CARTER, owner and editor-in-chief, first mechanic, and at times even general factotum at the office of the *Arrow*, was humped over his desk, rushing through galleys of proof. The office itself looked as if a hurricane had struck it. Evidences of the fire which had almost burned Carter out were everywhere. The hastily inserted panes of glass in the broken windows were finger-marked with putty; the sills and the walls generally were blackened with smoke; the floor was a sight to make a tidy housekeeper turn pale.

Through an open door into the pressroom could be seen many more indications of the late devastations. Everything in the way of cleaning up that could be left over until the current edition of the paper was out had been so left; the main thing had been to restore tightness and warmth to the old building so that work could be resumed there. Carter himself had turned carpenter and lent a hand to boarding in temporarily one wall which had been burned half out. He had hardly eaten or slept since the midnight hour when he had jumped out of bed with the acrid smell of smoke in his nostrils—he slept in

a bare little room above his office—and had dashed downstairs in great leaps to turn in the alarm.

Carter was a whirlwind—"a whiz for work," as Shep, his young linotypist and pressman, called him. Tall, thin, lanky, his plain face rugged below his sandy hair, he was the type which eats up work like desirable food. Obstacles were only stimuli to him; he had enjoyed every hour of every day since he had taken over the paper; no wonder he was beginning to make it "go." This fire, coming just as it did at the most inconvenient time in all the year, had merely whipped his energies into greater action. Get that paper out on time, and make it as good an issue as he had promised it should be—of course he would, if he had to write every line himself. To do that, however, even for him, would have been physically impossible; there was not time, though he worked twenty-four hours on end.

One of the first ideas that had occurred to him, when his two best "features" had failed him, and he could not duplicate the articles for which he had paid a high price, was to call up Ruth Rust Redfield, his good friend. If anybody could and would help him out in this crisis, it was she. Not only had she been sending him articles from college month after month; many had been the clippings, the cartoons, the suggestions. She had backed him from the beginning with that live interest which helps im-

measurably in the tackling of a difficult task. He had blessed his lucky stars that in this emergency she was at home and at hand.

Her hearty sympathy and her eagerness to aid him had warmed his heart and made everything seem possible. And now, with her two articles in her hand, and Felix beside her—a man, confound him! who could turn out just such stuff as Andy needed, and *wouldn't*—she was hurrying as fast over the snowy road as she could push Felix into walking. He really was proceeding faster than he had done in months, but to Rusty it seemed a snail's pace.

The door opened and Carter looked up. His friend Rusty was entering, followed by a pale person with a beetling sort of brow, extremely well dressed, who regarded the editor with a sombre gaze.

"Mr. Carter, you remember Mr. Rowe whom you met on the road the other day. You know he is staying at our house this winter. Mr. Rowe is the famous war correspondent, so he is able to sympathize with your present troubles."

It was a wicked introduction, but Rusty couldn't help it. She meant Carter to understand that it gave him leave to recognize his visitor, as he wouldn't have ventured to do on the basis of his invalidism and the reports of young Shepherd, his helper.

Carter jumped up, running his fingers through his sandy hair, one lock of which was perpetually falling

over his forehead when he was at work. He came forward with a pleasant grin of recognition.

"Felix Rowe—war correspondent? We haven't forgotten you, Mr. Rowe. Sorry you've been laid by a while—glad you're getting around. You find us in a mess here, but we've no time for apologies. Take a chair—if I can find one clean enough to sit on. Rusty, here's one for you."

He swept his own handkerchief across both chairs. "I shall probably wipe my face with it two minutes from now," he prophesied, cheerfully. "Well, you've brought me the copy? You're a little brick!"

He took the sheets from Rusty and, sitting on the edge of his desk, ran through them with the practised eye which takes in paragraphs at a swoop. "My word," he ejaculated once or twice as he swept the pages aside, "this is ripping!" He slapped his hand on his thigh as he came to the concluding paragraph in Grandfather Redfield's article, and chuckled happily. "Why, the old boy has done a thing that we younger fellows simply couldn't touch. We'll have to print an extra edition for this. All the old timers in the county will want to send it to their friends."

He slid off the desk and ran to the door of the pressroom. "Shep," he called, "set this stuff up in a hurry—the biggest hurry you ever knew." And disappeared, banging the door after him.

Something totally unexpected was happening to Felix Rowe. It was all a part of this strange day, but it was the biggest part yet. The sight of this man Carter, so evidently tingling to his finger tips with the exciting pressure of this exigency in his affairs, was one which stirred the invalid unaccountably. This smudgy little village newspaper office in its disorder was the scene of real action, though the thing to be achieved was only the bringing out of a paper the size of which, when laid beside the city daily on which Felix had made his reputation, was that of a pygmy beside a giant. Its twelve pages would have been swallowed up in one section of that famous newspaper, which bulked so heavily in its Sunday editions that citizens found it impossible to stuff them into the most capacious overcoat pocket and so carried them home under the arm.

Felix watched the door for Carter's return. When he did appear it was with two harassed lines between his gray-blue eyes.

"Rusty," he said, "do you suppose you could stay long enough to run through this proof for me?" He picked up the galleys he had dropped upon his desk when his visitors came in. "I've got to do a little more tinkering with the linotype machine. The floor got burned through at that point, and it's thrown things just enough out of alignment to bother my operator."

"Of course." Rusty pulled off her gray coat and sat down at the desk.

"Care to see our distresses in here, Mr. Rowe?" Carter offered the suggestion over his shoulder as he departed again. Felix went along after him.

If the outer office had looked in trouble, the press-room was, as Carter had put it, in distress indeed. How it was possible to print a newspaper in such a place was rather beyond Felix's imagination, but the problem interested him. The floor had indeed been burned away in many places; the whole expanse seemed to be shored up, and none too securely, at that. Why the press itself didn't tumble through into the basement was a mystery. One might almost expect at any minute to see it go.

"The fire started in the cellar," Carter said, working away expertly at the machine, "and if it hadn't been stopped just when it was, everything here would have been a mass of hopeless junk down there. As luck would have it, a lot of old iron piping had been stored in the cellar, and there were a good many big loose stones that had worked out of the inner side of the thick foundation wall—you see, the building's nearly eighty years old. While the other fellows were working on the fire itself, I was sticking up everything I could to hold up the weight. I don't know yet why we didn't go through, to say nothing of the whole building's going. We've got a mighty

fine volunteer fire department, and the water pressure's good. The boys worked like the devil to save us, and they did it. The next issue after this is going to be a special firemen's paper—they deserve it."

Felix stood watching Carter until it occurred to him that he was tired, and then he went back to the office. Rusty was still revising proof. She picked up two or three galleys and held them out to him.

"Please?" she said, her eyes instantly bent again upon her task. "I don't read proof often enough to be very quick—some of the signs bother me."

It would have been impossible to refuse, of course, so he went at it. The signs didn't bother Felix; he was too familiar with them. He ran his pencil down the lines, transposing words, making the slashing marks which indicate that something comes out or goes in, that a line of type is from the wrong font, that a capital should be used, that a comma is missing, that a paragraph is out of alignment. As he reached the end of his last galley Carter came back, his hands black, his face grimy, the bandage upon his wrist soiled, his sandy hair more awry than ever. But his eyes were sparkling.

"She's working like a lady again," he said, "and ready for more. Shep'll set up those two articles now in a jiffy. When the corrections are made the paper'll be pretty nearly ready to go to press. All we lack—and we do lack it—is one-half column of

editorial. The editor himself hasn't another line of stuff in him, he's too busy with these practical details. Of course I can pad out with poetry or something, but—I hate to."

He whistled a bar or two, took a turn up and down the office, then paused before Felix and addressed him directly:

"Mr. Rowe, if we put you down in front of a quite decent typewriter, we'd consider it a terrific honour, as well as an enormous favour, if you'd give us that half column, or anything at all that's even remotely pertinent. You must have covered a lot of city fires in your cub days. Couldn't you do half a column of contrast between the city fire and the small town one?—Or the city office and the country one?—Or even—I'm willing to be sacrificed, you know—between the city editor and the village one? Take me as I am." He glanced humorously down at his smeared trousers, his dingy shirt-sleeves, his dirty hands. "And if I could get a look in a mirror—the office two-by-four glass was smashed in the racket—I know I'd see what you do: a sight for the newspaper gods. Will you take the commission? We'll gladly pay you at—well—an average between our regular rates and yours. That'll probably be the best we can do."

If he hadn't added those last words—and Rusty was by no means sure, as she noted Felix's darkening

brow, that Carter hadn't meant to sting him with a near-insult that might turn the trick—it was more than doubtful if, even in a situation in which no regular fellow of a newspaper man would have refused to lend a hand without thought of compensation, Felix wouldn't have grimly refused and marched out of the place. He was fully capable of it, Rusty thought; though she told herself that it was always to be remembered that he might not be wholly responsible for the state of mind which made him so difficult to deal with.

Carter was looking at him with an odd expression—studying him, Rusty realized. Carter was a reader of men's minds, like most in his profession. Carter knew Felix Rowe's work in the past; had read a thousand columns of his; had admired his original, crisp, finished style. Carter had gone to the Great War not as Felix had—he had gone as a captain of artillery and had come home as a major, with three wound stripes to his credit. Over there he hadn't been able to follow the noted young correspondent's work, and since then had wondered what had become of him. Now, of course, he knew—and understood, having heard much about him since his arrival at the Redfields', something of the "mental hurdle" Felix hadn't yet been able to get over. Carter now saw a chance to get him over it. And even with his own present problems uppermost in his mind, he was

jumping at that chance. It was like Andy Carter, said Rusty Redfield to herself, to be doing two things at once, and one of them for somebody else. She waited anxiously for the result.

"If you will take back that offer of pay," said Felix, very stiffly, "I'll take you at your word. The sight of you, just as you are, tempts me to see if there's a word of description left in me. I'd thought there wasn't. There may be, though I doubt it."

Then Rusty knew that she herself, by getting out of Felix an hour of work at her wobbly old typewriter, had made this thing possible. He had discovered that he could use his fingers as of old; Andy Carter's request had challenged his brain; and the meeting with Carter himself had, as Felix said, "tempted him." Carter's selection of a subject, too, had been inspired. The country editor under ordinary conditions, to the city newspaper man must be, beyond a thousand others, a theme to provoke him to his scintillating best. The country editor, evolving his regular weekly issue out of the ruins of a fire, his small press propped from falling through into the cellar by a shoring of pipe and stones, himself and the lad Shep his own staff of workmen—well, it was something to write of which would make a story such as city editors would seize upon with glee. If Felix could do it with so much as half of his old power, his wizardry with words, there would be no "feature" in

that New Year's edition of the *Arrow* that would be so likely to be copied all over the United States by the shears-wielders on the look-out for novel paragraphs.

Felix took off his overcoat—he had removed his gloves to do the proof-reading—and walked over to the machine Carter was hastily dusting for him. Carter slid in a sheet of paper. Then—

"You haven't seen the mess in the pressroom yet," he said carelessly to Rusty. "Want to take a look?"

She nodded and they went out. They closed the door behind them. On the other side of it they looked at each other. Carter noiselessly pounded one fist into the other open palm—it was Rusty's own gesture. Rusty clasped her two hands together and made with them fierce gestures of exultation.

CHAPTER XXIII

"RUSTY, where in the world is Mr. Rowe?"

Rusty, coming into the house, her eyes brilliant with excitement, encountered Lee Brainard in the hallway.

"Over at the office of the *Arrow*—and very busy," Rusty replied briefly.

"At the office of the *Arrow!* Why, he must have forgotten that he had an engagement with me. Call him up for me, will you, Rusty?—there's a dear. I don't like to myself, really. Of course I wouldn't forgive or remind any other man, but knowing his peculiar condition—well, one can't be hard on him."

"I can't call him up, Lee, if you'll excuse me. I told you, my dear, he's busy."

"Busy!" Lee laughed. She was a radiant figure as always, and with special reason just now, for she had spent the morning altering a certain costume in black and red to make it even more effective than her dressmaker had conceived it. The work had kept her in her own room, to be sure, and away from Felix, but she had considered the time well spent. It was annoying that now that she was ready to

meet his approving eyes, the owner of those eyes should be absent.

"Yes, busy," repeated Rusty, with emphasis. "I know the very idea is inconceivable, but it's true, and he mustn't be interrupted."

"Have you suddenly become his guardian, dearest?" Lee's tone was sweet, but it held a meaning for Rusty's ears.

"Not a bit of it. He'll be at liberty in an hour or so, and then I've no doubt he'll be at your service."

"He's more likely to be perfectly exhausted. It takes so little to tire him. I don't think any of you understand him, Rusty. I do, because I'm made of the same fibre—the same high-strung nerves."

"Oh, are you? I should have said you and Mr. Rowe were as different as the poles." Having made this speech Rusty smiled again; she realized suddenly that she was behaving as if she had a special and peculiar interest in the wintry boarder. Let Lee understand him better than anybody else, if she thought she did; it was time somebody understood Felix. "But that makes you only the more congenial, I should think," she added, more discreetly.

"We *are* congenial. And he's really delightful when one gets to know him. The reason you've all found him so unresponsive, I'm sure, is because you've—well, if you don't mind my saying it,

Rusty—you've not taken pains to please his sensitive tastes. He's very discriminating, you know."

"Oh, heavens!" Rusty was off again, one foot on the lowest stair; this statement was too much for her. "You two discriminating ones get together and found a little society, Lee. You can begin by cataloguing us all, and then pigeon-holing us." She ascended three stairs, turned, and said, in a quite different tone, as if the other subject were dismissed: "How stunning you look!"

"Do I?" It never took much to shift Lee to a new ground, especially if her own image was to be found upon it. "I'm glad you like this frock. I really want to please you, you know, Rusty. And I thought perhaps the best way was to put on something I hadn't worn before."

"Splendid! You're a joy to the eye."

Rusty went on up the stairs. Lee went into the sitting-room and looked into the dining-room, where the telephone hung against the wall. She crossed the dining-room, quietly opened the kitchen door, and peeped in. Nobody there—nobody anywhere. She went back to the telephone and rang up the *Arrow* office.

"Is Mr. Rowe there, please?"

Carter, answering, was mightily tempted to tell her Mr. Rowe wasn't, but truth prevailed. Reluctantly he summoned Felix, who, looking up from

his typewriter with a slightly dazed expression, took the call.

"Oh, Mr. Rowe," said the low and pleasant voice, "I know you didn't mean to forget, but you see I couldn't take any chance of missing our walk. Shall I expect you soon?"

Carter, in the offing, couldn't hear this message, but he did hear the reply, and he was grinning to himself as he realized its significance.

"I'm afraid not, if you'll excuse me. I've found something I really have to do, and the sensation is so unusual I'm unwilling to cut it short."

"Oh, don't, of course. I'm sorry I interrupted you."

"That's quite all right," Felix returned, politely. "Thank you for calling."

CHAPTER XXIV

FELIX ROWE, ex-war correspondent, sat before a battered typewriter in the office of the *Arrow*, or rather in a very small inner room opening from the larger one which was the general office. At the last moment Carter had moved the typewriter in here, saying that it was a better spot in which to work, because there might be people in whom Felix would not care to see. The room contained nothing else except a row of shelves across one side upon which were placed stacks of the old files of the paper dating back seventy-seven years. The one window gave upon an alleyway between the *Arrow* building and the back ends of a row of village stores—not an inspiring view. The yellow shade which hung at this window was crackled and partly torn away from the stick at its lower edge. The floor was bare.

For the moment the whole place was still, except for the distant noises in the pressroom. Never in his life had Felix sat down before a typewriter in so quiet a spot. This quietness was somehow disconcerting; it occurred to him that his chances for being able to concentrate upon work after three years of idleness would have been better if he had

been back in the old city offices amidst a thousand clackings and rackets. But—he had accepted the challenge of this country editor. If it was a possible thing he must produce something—anything—not to be utterly ashamed. And when he recalled the look of Andrew Carter, doggedly getting out a newspaper against every obstacle, it was unthinkable that he, Felix Rowe, should stand up and admit that he hadn't been able to turn out a line.

But ten minutes had passed and he hadn't written so much as that first line. He was beginning to grow cold with fear—the very fear he had feared so long—when something happened to take his thoughts from himself and transport them as far as three thousand miles away, where he had last heard that remembered voice.

The outer door of the larger office had opened, and quick footsteps were heard there, as of two men entering. At the same time the door of the press-room was flung open, and Felix, through his own open door, caught a glimpse of Carter rushing in, a wide smile lighting his face. Felix could not see the arrivals, but he recognized the first speaker instantly —nobody could mistake Doctor Burns.

"Andy Carter, this is a blamed shame! I'd have got out before to tell you so, but went out of town in a hurry the night of your fire and only just came back. Anything we can do for you? By the look of

you, you're on the job more competently than ever. Got to skip this week's issue, haven't you?—Careful! —I've got a bet up on it with our friend here!"

"Skip nothing. You've lost your bet—unless it was on me."

"Of course it was on you. The only trouble was the other man was set to bet on you, too, so we both stand to lose if you don't make good."

"We go to press to-night as usual. How are you, Mr. Black? This is mighty kind of you."

"Kind to ourselves, Carter. I was out of town, too, when this thing happened. The Doctor picked me up on my way to a trolley to run out and see you. Is it a bad loss? Tell us about it. No—of course you haven't time. We'll wait till the paper is out. Meanwhile, I've some notices and the report of a convention for you, if you can use them."

"You bet I can, Mr. Black."

The conversation went on. But in the inner room Felix was listening with every pulse throbbing, to the sound of one voice only. He didn't hear the others, he waited in suspense till the deepest voice of the three, with a peculiar clear and resonant note in it, took part, which it only occasionally did. Carter was pouring out a hasty story of the fire, and Burns's exclamations were more frequent than those of the other man. But from the first sound of that voice there had been no doubt in Felix's mind to whom it

belonged. And as the talk went on he got up and crept across the small room, close to the door, and stood there wondering if by any chance, without being seen himself, he could get a sight of the man out there, in order to verify his conviction. He didn't want to be caught peeping, and yet—why, he had simply *got* to see Bob Black!

For Black had been chaplain of the regiment over in France to which Felix Rowe had been most often attached in his office of correspondent. Black had got him some of his chances to see things. Felix had —why, he had stood beside the chaplain when he was burying some of the boys; had written descriptions of such scenes that had made the hearts of the readers over in America ache with sympathy. When Felix was hurt and in hospital Robert Black had driven many difficult and risky miles to get to him. A thousand associations Felix had with this man. As for liking him—he had never cared for any man so much.

And the curious thing about it was that though for three years Felix had been fighting memories of the war, the sound of Black's voice, though it brought everything back to him, was not painful to hear. It was welcome, it was alluring, it was—well, Felix could no more resist its drawing power than he had been able to do in France. Many a time had he crowded his way in to hear Bob Black speak to the boys on a Sunday morning, though a church was the

last place in the world where Felix had ever cared to go. Somehow a khaki tent had been different; rough boards had been so unlike cushioned pews that they didn't even suggest them; and the things Black said no fellow could get away from, nor had wanted to get away.

And now, somehow, Felix Rowe, seemingly not at all of his own volition, was at the doorway of this inner office, staring out at Robert Black. Black didn't see him, he was standing with his side face toward that doorway—tall, erect, just as Felix remembered him, except that now the crisp, half-curly, short black hair above his ears showed a slight sprinkling of gray. His high-cheek-boned, good-looking Scottish face was fresh and well-coloured as ever; he looked what he was, a man of vigour in the late thirties only. But that touch of gray at the temples brought the instant thought to Felix:

"You got that 'over there,' Bob Black. And I just about know where."

R. P. Burns, M. D., suddenly caught sight of Felix, but his wits leaped to a conclusion, as they usually did, and he only nodded in his direction. He had surprised a look in Felix's face he had never seen there before, and whatever had caused it he didn't want to disturb it, so he went on talking. Carter, absorbed, didn't see Felix at all. It wasn't till the whole group turned to go toward the press-

room door, at Carter's invitation, that Black faced Felix, standing in the doorway beside that into the pressroom. Black glanced at Felix casually, looked at him more intently, then searchingly, as the party advanced across the floor. Then, as Felix made a slight move toward him, Black's face lighted with the look Felix had seen a hundred times, and which had never failed to mean: "*You*—it's *you* I want to see." And because there had never been the least doubt in the mind of the correspondent, any more than there had been in the minds of the doughboys, after they came to know him, that the look meant what it seemed to mean, Felix's thumping heart turned as warm as it had done in those old, terrible days. He strode across three paces, and his hand fell into Black's and gripped it. His eyes, now, to Doctor Burns's amazement, grown suddenly bright with joy, looked straight into the splendid black ones which were regarding him with corresponding gladness, and the world became again to Felix Rowe, for the moment at least, a place to live in.

"My word, Rowe!" (Out of thousands of such contacts in war time Black was remembering his very name!) "Why, where in the world did you come from? It's great to see you, simply great!"

"Where did *you* come from, Parson? I can't believe my eyes!"

"Come from, you ignorant chap? Why, is my

fame so little worth that you don't know this is my habitat? The question is, how you came to be out here, in my friend Carter's newspaper office?"

They continued to regard each other, laughing, and with more handshakings. Burns looked on, held by the phenomenon of the look in Felix's face. Laughing!—this lantern-jawed, sombre spectre of a young man, a grim half-smile the best he had seemed able to produce since the Doctor had known him. Carter, who didn't understand much of it all, was also so interested that he stayed watching, though there were innumerable things upon his mind.

"You live here?" Felix questioned, incredulously.

"Well, nineteen miles away, in the town, where my church is. But tell me what you are doing, Rowe. I haven't heard a word of you since we all came home, though I wrote you at the address you gave me."

"You did? I never got it. I thought you'd forgotten me."

"You couldn't think that. I did hear some rumour that you were invalided again, over here, but I couldn't get track of you." Black turned to Red, who was his best friend. "Have you known Felix Rowe before?"

"Well, by jolly, this is the queerest thing I've struck," Burns ejaculated. "Do you mean to say I haven't told you of this patient of mine?"

"You've told me of a good many patients, first and

last, old man. But never of Rowe, by name, or I should have been asking, '*What* Rowe?'"

"I told you I was going to bring him to church, if I could get him."

"You often say that," Black reminded him, smiling. "But you haven't brought him."

"He's been a blamed difficult patient." Red's brilliant hazel eyes met Felix's, and Felix found himself smiling a little in return of the delightful grin on his physician's face. "And the fact that he's been staying out here, nineteen miles from your pulpit, and in the winter, has kept me from carrying out that intention—if he'd have permitted me to, which he probably wouldn't."

"Will you take me next Sunday?" Felix spoke to Red as he had never heard him speak—with repressed eagerness.

"I should say I will. My pew's right down in front, where this man Black never misses me. It's pretty hot gunfire sometimes, but I've got in the way of liking to be hit, when it's his gun that takes aim. If you knew him in France I presume you know what he can do in that line."

"I most certainly do. If you didn't know him in France, Doctor Burns, you don't know all he's capable of."

"Maybe not, but I have some sort of an idea of it, you know. Three times have I sat with a board of

trustees who have refused to let him accept some flattering call elsewhere. He may get away from us yet, but it won't be our fault if he does."

"Rowe,"—Black's hand was on his arm for an instant and then let go. He hadn't the clerical habit of hanging on to men's arms until they felt "handled." It was just a friendly touch which established a contact—"I want to know all about you. When can you come to see me? If you come into church Sunday—this is Friday, isn't it?—will you stay for dinner and overnight, so we can talk over the old days? I can't wait any longer than that to see you."

Even Felix's habitual cynicism was not proof against this invitation. It was no "shop" enthusiasm, such as clergymen have perpetually to assume, whether they feel it or not. Robert Black really wanted to talk over those days in France with his friend Felix Rowe, and that was why he was so convincing.

So Felix accepted, and then, slightly delirious with the change in the atmosphere surrounding him, he shook hands once more and went back to his job in the inner office.

And now—he *wanted* to write! But the subject he wanted to write about was Bob Black. What other worth considering?

The discipline of former days incredibly gripped him, however, and he set at work upon the subject Carter had given him.

CHAPTER XXV

ON THE road, driving back the nineteen miles toward home, Burns and Black talked Felix Rowe over, going at the subject, as was natural, from two quite different viewpoints. Having begun, in the earlier years of their acquaintance, by seeing most things from widely divergent angles, they now saw many things eye to eye. But not all—and never would. The friendship between them, however, was such as few men know.

"To tell the truth," Red admitted, reluctantly, "I haven't taken the active interest in the case I suppose I owe any patient sent me by Jack Leaver of Baltimore. The fellow hasn't appealed to either my professional or my human side. Nothing about him has laid hold of my sympathies or called for my respect. Jack made a tactical error in sending him to me. I've practically left him to the Redfields to kill or cure. If knowing them couldn't call out his reserves, I don't know what could."

"You haven't been interested in him? Why? I thought you were interested in anything human, or brute, for that matter, if it was alive and you could make it more so."

"That's precisely it. He isn't alive. He's a cold fish, and I never did like cold fish."

"A cold fish!" Black had been looking out of the car window, and now his gaze came around to Red with a flash. "Oh, no—whatever he is, he isn't that. He may be a half-dead dog—he looks it, physically, though his eye is bright enough."

"His eye!" It was the Doctor's turn to ejaculate. "I give you my word, Bob Black, when that eye of his lit on you there came into it the first expression of real honest-to-goodness animation I've caught in it. He's gone around all this time with the look of a dying frog. And the worst of it was I could never be sure the whole thing wasn't just a pose—malingering because he didn't want anybody to make him go to work, which of course is all he needs."

"A cold fish—a dying frog!" Black repeated these extraordinary descriptions. "It certainly does seem queer, in the light of what I know about Felix Rowe, to hear anybody speak of him that way. A half-dead dog, as I said, and as I'll admit. But on my word, Red, the dog was a prince among dogs when I knew him."

"Hm-m!" Red sounded dubious. "Hard to believe it. I've seen sick veterans of the war before now—plenty of 'em—but in the worst cases there was always something to build on, something to appeal to. Even where pluck was gone, desire was left,

desire to be something again. Poor boys, they were *all* desire. In this Rowe there's seemed to be no desire whatever. Why, man, the fellow who could live in the same house with Lincoln Redfield and Marcia his wife and not show a spark of appreciation of them, or feel challenged to make himself fit to be their friend—I don't know what to think of him, and that's the truth. The times I've wanted to kick him have been so numerous it's a wonder I haven't lost hold of my muscular control and done it, just to ease my mind—not in the expectation of kicking any daylight into him."

Black was listening intently. "I find it as hard to realize that as you do to understand my feeling about him. He came over to France with his reputation as a clever newspaper man behind him. He was rather hard of eye—had knocked about a lot, as reporters do—knew how to get his way—was absolutely fearless—could be the life of any group when he cared to be. As a matter of fact, I've known him to be of tremendous service in a bad hour when morale was low, just telling stories in a whisper that made the boys explode. I never knew such a story-teller. He could give a twist to a tale in the last sentence that would simply make a tombstone laugh."

Red shook his head. "Felix—making anybody laugh!" he murmured.

"Even so. And other things. He would put an

arm around them when they wanted to cry but couldn't. He would write a letter for an inarticulate doughboy that must have made some mother happy for a month. When a chance came to get up in front and see a clash he'd be off like a shot, and more than many times he was in the thick of things with a dead man's gun. He——"

"In short, you want me to understand that he was a hero and that I've failed to recognize him." Red's tone was rather grim.

Black looked around at him, smiling. "Oh, no," he said, "no particular hero, beyond what plenty of other fellows showed themselves in those days. Just a live, warm, breathing dog, galloping around among the other dogs, instead of that cold fish you've been conceiving him. And if in some way he got wounded to the death in mind as well as body, we've got to be patient with him, you and I."

"You can begin being patient," said Red, irritably, "where I leave off. You take the case over. This may possibly be true——"

Black lifted his eyebrows with a meaning glance.

"Of course it *is* true," the Doctor amended, "since you say so. But whatever's happened since those spectacular days, it seems to have happened so thoroughly I can only believe that when they were over he reverted to type. He was born a fish, the war made a dog of him, but to fishhood he's returned.

I don't believe you can change him back again to anything with a tail that wags."

"You saw him in Carter's office," Black persisted. "If you hadn't seen him before, would you have found him so distasteful?"

Red looked now into the fine, purposeful face beside him. "He was looking at you," he said, significantly. "When he looks at me he gets another expression."

"My dear Redfield Pepper Burns," Black burst out, "I've followed you around a hospital too many times not to know how *you* get looked at. If this chap baffles you it's because you've allowed yourself to put up your guard against him. Maybe I don't remember what a time I had breaking down that guard of yours. It was like tackling a stone wall. But I was a minister, and you didn't like ministers, and didn't intend to like me. I never knew you to put that guard up against a patient before. The reason you're not curing Felix Rowe is because—you don't like him. And don't mean to."

The two faced each other, the car slowing. It wasn't the first time, nor the hundredth, that these two had had something out between them; that they had told each other the plain truth. Absolute honesty was the great thing each was sure of from the other. Red's brow darkened. He didn't like being told the plain truth, any better than he ever had. Few of us do. He himself had told it to

Robert Black on certain occasions, and Black had taken it standing. Red knew he had ultimately to take Black's criticism the same way. The worst of it was, his friend was pretty nearly sure to be right. But that didn't make the stricture any easier to admit.

"I certainly didn't intend to fail in my duty," he said, his temper rising. "I'm no psychiatrist. Leaver has the mistaken idea that I manage my patients by my knowledge and application of certain principles of psychology and psychotherapy. I don't—never did. Manage 'em by knocking 'em on the head when I think they need it, or holding their hands in a crisis if they're the sort who can have their hands held without detriment. I never did get on with hysterical women, or prosperous business men scared of their lives. So I'm not the man to handle this case. To tell the truth, the more I've seen of the fellow the less I've thought he was worth saving to an uninterested world. The only reason why—well—he has a father and mother who worship him (strange enough!) and for their sakes——"

"Precisely. And I'm not going to argue with you as to your qualifications as a healer of broken spirits. I happen to know the facts. You've probably healed more broken spirits in your day than any man I know."

Red looked around at him. "The only time, Bob," he said, "when I doubt your sanity is when you get saying that sort of thing. That tendency of yours to idealize——"

"Nonsense! You can't crawl out of it that way.—— Well, see here. Bring him to church Sunday, as you agreed.—No, I'm not going to preach at him, but maybe afterward in my study we can begin talking a bit. And remember what I said about keeping your guard up against him. Don't do that, Red—it's not worthy of you."

"What do you have to come back to that for?" the Doctor growled. "Why rub it in?"

"So it won't get out!"

Red said nothing to this, but he suddenly let the car out and ran it for a couple of miles at an excessive speed. Black sat back in his seat, silent and quietly smiling. Well he knew what a specific for his friend's touch-and-go temper was a rapid flight like this. Then, quite as suddenly as the car had leaped ahead it slowed down again, for a group of children playing in the road. It stopped, and Burns opened the coupé door and leaned out.

"See here, Sonny," he said, addressing the oldest boy, "you're the leader of this gang, aren't you?"

An instant of amazed silence; then—"Sure I am."

"Then if you keep 'em out of the road they'll stay out, won't they?"

The boy nodded. His freckled face reddened.

"Well, that's all. I thought you were the one to speak to. You see, there are a couple of little fellows, about the age of some of these, in the hospital this morning, that a car skidded into last night, and it'll be quite a while before they get out to play again—couple of months, maybe. I'd hate to see any of these little chaps get hit that way. So you see to it, will you, that they don't?"

"You bet," said the boy.

The car drove on. Before it rounded a curve Black looked back.

"All on the sidewalk," he reported, "and still staring. And none of them either knocked on the head or held by the hand to accomplish it."

Red glanced around at him. His lips broke into an irresistible smile. "Oh, you go hang, Bob!" he enjoined his friend. "Of course you score!"

CHAPTER XXVI

IN A pew at the "Stone Church"—which was the outstanding church in the large suburb where Doctor Burns lived—sat Felix Rowe, beside the Doctor himself, with Mrs. Burns and the children upon his other side. It was the first Sunday after New Year's.

The last time Felix had gone to church had been almost four years ago, and then it hadn't been a church at all, but a bit of rough ground upon which he had sat in a great group composed of men in khaki. A very different scene, indeed. But the preacher had been the same. Felix was staring at him now, and in spite of the black silk gown with its velvet bands upon the sleeve, he wasn't finding it difficult to realize that the man inside the austere garb was the same man whom he had known in an olive-drab uniform with the Cross upon its collar. The same searching black eyes, the same clear voice, the same way—yes, it was precisely the same way, with the things he said, and the way he looked at you—of getting at you where you lived.

He was getting at where Felix lived right now. Getting at him so far in, so deep down, that Felix

was feeling as if the speaker could see straight inside him. Bob Black had always given him that feeling, as he well remembered. Yet, though he laid you bare, it was never in a way you could resent, for he was laying the other fellow bare at the same time—and himself, too. That was the great thing Black had always done. He had never preached at his men, he had always seemed to be down among them. He didn't say "you" nearly as many times as he said "we." It was "our problems," "our mistakes," "our fears," "our ideals," "our God." And you had to listen to him, you couldn't get away.

Red, listening, too, because he couldn't help it either, knew that Felix was listening. The motionless figure beside him gave evidence of how complete was its owner's absorption. The usually restless fingers, the chief mark of the invalid's lack of self-control, were still; not even his slim foot moved. And then, suddenly, the fingers did move—it was just after Black had said something electric which had shivered through the consciousness like a bolt from the skies. Felix's hand went into his pocket and brought out a silver pencil; he reached forward and caught the printed slip of the order of services from the rack in front of him, laid it upon a hymn book, and the next instant his pencil was flying over the blank back of the paper with lightning rapidity, the while his body remained so quiet that one behind

him wouldn't have known what he was doing. And at the sight of those flying dots and dashes, Red, beside him, felt his own pulses quickening. The instinct—and the will—not to lose a word, because he had the skill—even the long-unused skill—to retain them by the trained reporter's method, had come back to Felix Rowe as by a miracle. A still greater miracle, or so it seemed to Red, who thought he knew how easily one might forget the use of all those difficult and intricate signs, was the fact that Felix was doing this trick as if he had done it last but yesterday.

But now, just as suddenly as it had gone into action, the flying pencil halted, stayed a moment, went on—and stopped again. It dropped out of Felix's fingers. Red, instantly recalled from his listening to his observation of his patient, felt a thrill of dread. Had the young man's brain functioned thus marvellously for a quarter of an hour only to go dead again with the old inertia? He stole a worried glance at Felix's face. It was, he saw, paler than it had been, but the eyes were now fixed intently upon Black. And Black indeed was speaking with such force and power that it seemed small wonder if no man could care to try to transcribe him; rather must he watch him, catch every look as well as every inflection, listen not only with the ears but with the eyes, if such a thing may be.

This, evidently, was what Felix was now doing.

Fascinated in the beginning by the manner of the speaker, attracted by his extraordinary ability, known of old, he had felt that he must "take him down," in the fashion of the old days. But now the need to get all of him, everything he had to give, to miss nothing in the effort to record his words alone, had stopped that effort in full flight, and brought the young man back to be a listener only. A listener? Not perhaps in all the church was there just such a hearer of those stirring, heart-searching words.

The service ended. There was a strange look on Felix's face, which Red noted with uneasiness. Had the tension induced by the sermon been too great?—Yes, Red was getting really interested in his patient now, no doubt of that.

"I want to see Mr. Black," said Felix in Red's ear. "Right away, if it's possible. And you, too. Can you manage it? By yourselves, please."

Red nodded. He had come to think of his patient as incarnate passivity; to have him want to do something and to do it instantly was a good symptom. Yet he didn't like that pallor of face. By now Felix had acquired a fairly normal colour of skin; the daily walks and the good food had taken care of that, as they could be expected to do.

"I'll arrange it," Red said. "Wait here."

He made some sort of inconspicuous signal to his

wife, and after a pleasant word or two to Felix she passed out of the pew with the children and left him there. He turned his face away from the departing congregation, and when the aisle was free went slowly down it toward the vestry door, into which he had seen Red disappear. Three minutes later Red returned and beckoned.

"He'll see us in his study back here when he's disposed of the people who are waiting for him by the door."

Red had waylaid Black and got a word with him in spite of plenty of people crowding round.

"Will you put everything aside and have an interview with my patient *now?*"

Black had given his friend one quick scrutinizing look. In spite of Red's well-known impetuosity of behaviour, which he had not outgrown with the passing years, he was not accustomed to take the minister's time in public places without good reason. Black saw in Red's hazel eyes the peculiar glint which meant that something was afoot.

"Certainly," he said. "In my study, in ten minutes?"

"We'll be there."

Red took Felix to the place—one of those scholastic-looking church studies, lined with books, its furnishings heavy with dignity, its windows of dim stained glass, which are apt to give the effect of a clois-

tered seclusion, out of the world—very possibly out of much contact with human life. Somehow Black's study did not have quite that look. The massive desk was full of papers and literature, to be sure, in an orderly arrangement such as a scholar employs, but the low tops of the black walnut bookcases were crowded with photographs in standing frames, with others upon the walls above. The faces which looked out from them were those either of young men or of children. That of his wife, the only one upon his desk, was also the only one of a woman in the room. A lovely, intelligent, spirited face it was, one to linger over. But the rows upon rows of faces of men redeemed the minister's study from all appearance of an ascetic withdrawal. Somehow one knew, at a glance, that the owners of those faces were accustomed to come there, in proper person, and that the thought of them was always with the inhabitant of the room at his work.

Felix went at once to stand with his back to the room, apparently scanning the pictured faces. Whether he saw them or not, Red doubted. But the Doctor didn't watch his patient; his own mind was busy with speculations. Whatever lack of interest he had had in Felix up to the hour of Black's strictures upon Red's indifference, as they drove home in the car from Carter's newspaper office, it was being replaced with a growing preoccupation with the case.

From the hour that he had read, with a sense of amazement, Felix's article in that New Year's edition of the *Arrow*, Burns had understood that the mind he had been asked to help in salvaging was well worth the effort. If, in this strangely sudden way, Felix had come to a crisis in his hitherto veiled affairs, it was for his physician to help him through it, and to procure for him the opportunity he had wished. Well did Red know that there is a tide in the mental life of a man—especially in the pathological mental life—which must be taken at the flood, or it may ebb, and, unlike the tides of Nature, come never to that flood again.

The door opened quietly upon the silence of these two, and Robert Black came in, slipping off his gown as he entered, and hanging it away in a press behind the door. With the laying aside of the priestly garment, he did not, however, at such a moment, lay aside the atmosphere of the day. He hadn't come in with an assumed air of every-day liveliness, but with a certain pleasant gravity upon him which seemed to recognize that he had been summoned to an interview of moment. He shook hands with Felix, who had turned at the opening of the door, and motioned him to a chair not far away. Then he said, in the straightforward tone Felix remembered so well, "You wanted to see me, Rowe? I'm glad of that, if I can be of any use."

"You can," Felix replied, and glanced at Red.

The Doctor spoke quickly. "Sure you want me to stay?"

"If you will."

Red drew up another chair, though at a further distance, and the interview was on.

Felix began slowly, but it was not with the slowness of languor to which Red had become accustomed in him. Indeed, it didn't seem quite the same Felix whom Red knew at all. As in the newspaper office, he seemed to become a different man in the presence of Robert Black. And as a thousand times before, Red found himself noting what it was in this friend of his which drew men to him in spite of themselves, even as Red himself, in spite of himself, had long ago been drawn. No man could look at that face and not know. It was the face of a man who cares nothing whatever for himself, and everything for other people, yet does it in a sturdy way which conveys no sense of an attitude over-emotional.

"I suppose," Felix began, with his eyes meeting Black's, "I must have been waiting for this day. To hear you, I mean, and—to come to myself. And—to find out what to do. One thing I know—I've got to tell you and Doctor Burns. I don't see any way out of that, any longer. You've got to know the sort of rotter I am."

Both men were silent, waiting. One cannot reply

to a statement like that, even from one who has been ill in body and mind, until it has been made clear as to what it is with which one has to deal.

"Well, then," he went on, hurriedly, as if, once started, he must get it over, "the truth is—I married a girl over there—and deserted her. An English girl—a nurse—she took care of me. We were married in London when we were both on leave. We had three days together there and then came back. I was well enough then to go back to my regiment, and she went on nursing. Then I was hit again and sent to another hospital—and it was after that I was sent home. I never saw her again. I never tried. I never even wrote to her—— Now you know," he ended, miserably, and his eyes fell away from Black's.

Inside the Doctor's brain, with Felix's first words, had been registered an actual shock: "If I'd been awake to this case I'd have known there was something on his mind—and conscience. Red, you're a fool—or worse."

Inside the minister's brain a quite different reaction was first: "You poor boy—no wonder you've suffered. But now—we've got to help you. We're going to get at the real *you*."

But he only said, gravely and quietly, "Go ahead, Rowe. There must be some explanation of a situation like that."

"I don't know any." Felix's heavy eyes were

full of trouble. "I never shall understand why I let myself be sent back without getting any word to her. Or why I didn't send her any from home. Somehow I couldn't seem to do it. It was like a weight I couldn't lift. I thought about it all the while, but I couldn't make myself do anything about it."

"Did you"—Black spoke slowly—"marry her because you really cared for her, or because——" He didn't say it, but he didn't need to.

Felix nodded. "I married her the way the most common doughboy married—as a matter of hasty attraction—in the circumstances. It was done in a reckless hour. Nothing seemed to matter."

"Did you mean to desert her, from the beginning?' The question had an edge, but it was the surgeon's probe, in the minister's kind hands. Now that Felix was confessing, he must tell it all.

"I don't know. For the life of me I don't know. I've been over it a thousand times. You see—from the time I was sent back to hospital the second time I was hazy—hazy a long while. When the ship sailed I was pretty weak—and queer, I guess. But that doesn't help it any. When I'd been home awhile I knew what I'd done—and I knew how to get her word. I didn't. I deserted her."

"She never followed you up?" This was from Red, a crisp question, for at the moment Felix had suddenly looked at him for the first time; looked at him

straightly and squarely, with those last uncompromising words of condemnation of himself.

"I had letters from her while I was in hospital. I know she tried to get to me, but she couldn't. That was when things were at their worst—June, 1918. I was sent home before the Armistice—to get me out of the way, because I was done for. I've never heard from her since. She could have found out where I was some way, through the Army records, but she didn't. And I—just let things go. I—it's queer, and maybe you won't believe me, but—I can't seem to remember what she looked like—only dimly. I don't understand that, but it's true."

"Are you sure you didn't dream it all, in that long illness of yours?" Black asked, quickly. "Do you know her name?"

"I didn't dream it. I wish I had. Her name was Lilian Harper."

A strange expression crossed Black's face; he got suddenly to his feet and walked away over to the stained-glass window, from which he could see nothing. A silence fell, during which Felix sat like a statue, and Red moved restlessly in his chair. Then Black came back.

"Rowe," he said, gently, "now that you realize your position, would you like to see her again? I'm not speaking of duty now, but desire. Did you care for her enough for that?"

Felix shook his head. "I couldn't have cared for her at all," he said, slowly. "It was just—I think—one of those madnesses that hit us, over there. When it was over, it was nothing. I wanted it over. I didn't want to be tied. But that doesn't change anything now. I've made up my mind I'm going to try to find her, and then I'll send for her. I know now I never can be myself again, or do anything worth doing, till I've done that. She may not be willing to come to me—she may want to divorce me. But I've got to give her a chance. Then—maybe I'll be able to look you in the face. Maybe I'll be able to look the Redfields in the face. I never have, yet."

"They're worth looking in the face," said Black. "I'm inclined to think, Rowe, it's been living with them these months, and not being able to look them in the face, that brought you to this day. Whatever I said to you in the sermon this morning was simply the last straw on the load of what you've been carrying. It's the Redfields who have cured you, Rowe."

"Am I cured? I'm not cured—yet." The tone was eager but incredulous.

"How about it, Red? Isn't a cure at least well under way when the diagnosis is made and the remedy applied—and the patient responds?"

"You bet it is." The Doctor's voice was hearty.

"And you're determined"—this was Black again—"to find your wife and give her every chance to return to you, or to be rid of you? Nothing can change that purpose now?"

"You wouldn't want to change it, would you?" Felix's head was up now, and there was no wavering in his eye.

"No. Absolutely not. It's the only thing to do. But—it can't be done, Rowe. The nurse, Lilian Harper, died before you ever left France—killed in an air-raid. You'd have known it if you hadn't been in hospital and in such desperate shape."

A queer gasp came from Felix's lips; then, suddenly, he turned and laid his arms upon the table beside him and his head down upon them, and hid his face. Red jumped up and began to walk up and down the room.

"You knew her?" he asked Black under his breath.

"No. My wife knew her—worked with her." There was an odd look on Black's face, but his lips closed. In his thoughts was the memory of the thing Jane had told him. "It was better," Jane had said, "that she went. She was one of those few, out of the hundreds who were honourable, who gave her worst, not her best. She was brave, but she was—weak. And the men weren't the better for her care."

There was a long silence. Then Felix got up, steadied himself against the table.

"I don't deserve to be free," he said, in a shaky voice. "Is it wrong to feel as if I'd been let out of prison?"

"It's not wrong," said Robert Black, "because you had given yourself up to stay in though the doors were open."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE *Arrow's* out! Here it is, Granddaddy!" Rusty ran into the room, a small whirlwind of excitement. She was flourishing half-a-dozen copies of the Eastville weekly newspaper, the ink barely dry upon the sheets.

"I call that an achievement," she cried, as the old man seized the paper she held out, adjusting his glasses with a hand that trembled. She came close and shouted in his ear: "The press almost broke down just as they were half printed, but Andy pulled things through, as usual. He was up all night setting up last-minute copy himself. He looks like a mule that's been in the ditch, and got out again by his own efforts. But here's the issue, out on time."

Mr. Redfield nodded, laughing happily. "He'd do it if anybody could, Andy would. Well, well, we had many a hard fight to come out on time, in the old days, with the hand-presses." But he had no time to talk. He was eagerly glancing along the columns.

Rusty dashed at her father, whose look, as she caught it, tore at her heart. He couldn't see—he couldn't see! She put one paper in his hand, she began to talk, pouring it out, while his face grew

brighter and brighter. It was at this moment that Felix came into the room. None of them saw him. He stopped just inside the doorway, then stepped back out of sight, listening.

"It's the best issue, Daddy, you ever knew—the kind of thing that's done under pressure and so has a tang to it. Granddad's article on the old days is even more corking in print than I thought it was when I took it down. Mr. Black's account of a hot debate in the convention he went to is the sort you know he does in the pulpit, and the flavour of it is delicious. You can just see those men getting up and shoving their hands into their pockets and saying, 'Mr. Chairman, I rise to a point of order. The gentleman who has just spoken——' and then ripping him wide open in a perfectly polite and deadly way. I'll read it to you by and by. Andy himself put in a couple of editorials that are the best stuff ever. But the thing that gets me is—my goodness gracious, Daddy!—is the column by"—she lowered her voice, but Felix could hear her, and the amazement in her tone—"our boarder. Our limp boarder! Our perfectly flaccid, spiritless, supine, apathetic invalid boarder! Why, he's come alive! He can write—why, he can write like a man with blood in his arteries!"

"What has he written about?" Lincoln Redfield inquired, covetously. "Could you——"

"Yes, I'll read it to you—I've got to—right now." And Rusty began.

Out in the hall, Felix, suddenly shaking in every nerve, listened shamelessly. It was poor stuff—he knew it was poor stuff; the girl was excited because she was so interested in the paper—and probably in the editor himself. If she thought Felix's words worth reading it was only because it was such an astonishment to her that he could write at all, after appearing to her like a brainless, spineless shadow of a man, as, in allied phrases, she hadn't hesitated to call him just now. A baby's first tottering steps are wonderful to those who look on with interest. That was all there was about his column—he was a dog who had managed to walk for a moment upon his hind legs; the occasion was noteworthy!

Rusty read on. She was a good reader; the crisp phrases came from her tongue without loss of meaning. Following Carter's suggestion, the article contrasted the village editor of the small weekly with the big chief of the great city daily, contrasted him in vivid, sharply drawn lines which made the two types stand out like cameos. Felix knew all about the city man, little about him of the obscure town, and least of all about Carter himself; but with the quickness of observation which in those of his profession is like the lens of a camera, be the shutter never so swiftly efficient, he had caught the spirit of

the man. Felix had drawn Carter to the life, collarless, with smuttied shirt-sleeves, screw-driver in one hand and galley proof in the other, struggling sturdily against difficult conditions; alert, eager, determined, as intent on his job and as competent to put it through as the man in the midst of the big city offices with everybody leaping to his bidding, flawlessly working presses on the floor below eating up copy and turning out the finished product whether the chief lived or died in his chair! As for the city man, he had been drawn to the life as well, as Felix had known him; a little, high-strung, tremendously knowing chap, with a temper like the edge of a newly sharpened cold chisel, and an eye for faults which was like that of a kingfisher for his prey in the stream fifty feet below.

Rusty kept on reading till she had finished the column, her voice thrilling with her admiration for each cleanly turned phrase, each line of pungently graphic description. Rusty could appreciate the art of this bit of work, and Felix recognized that she was a not incompetent critic. If she thought it good —and the testimony of his own ears told him unerringly that it wasn't half bad—what in the world had happened? He had turned in the copy to Carter without venturing to do more than make a hasty emendation here and there; he really had not dared to scan it critically. If the stuff was rotten

Carter could throw it out—and would, he was quite sure. He had no more than left the office before the conviction was strong upon him that the whole thing was drivel. To find, when he came reluctantly to scan it in print, that it made sense, and would pass muster with an uncritical village public, had been all he had hoped for. And if it did make sense, if it did get by, why, the credit could be due only to the mechanical functioning of a brain which had been so well trained in the days past that it could still work under pressure, if the need were great enough. Even so much, he had told himself, would be something to be thankful for. He really hadn't been willing to make a fool of himself in the intelligent gaze of that man Carter, country editor though he was—and all he was, in Felix's eyes.

Noiselessly he slipped away from the door. He seized his coat and hat from the old hat-rack in the hall, got hurriedly into them, and let himself out of the front door. He went at his usual slow pace down the snowy path to the road, and maintained this pace until he was out of sight of the house. Then he quickened it, little by little, walking faster and faster, as his racing thoughts took possession of him. He was hurrying toward the *Arrow* building and Andrew Carter, and between the unwonted exercise and his excitement, by the time he reached the place the blood was tearing through his arteries, a full current.

He threw open the door of the office. Carter was sitting at his desk, folding and wrapping and addressing copies of the paper with the rapidity of a machine, his face flushed, his hair awry. They were the copies he was sending to important people, all over the country, making a personal thing of it by doing it himself and addressing them in his own hand.

Felix gazed at him. Then: "Can't I help?" he inquired, somewhat breathlessly. His heart wasn't used to having to pump the blood through his circulation at any such rate; it was still a surprised heart, working with agitation.

Carter barely looked up, his pen in his mouth. "You bet you can," he said, around the pen. "I want to catch the night's mail with these, and Shep's busted his right hand."

Felix threw off his overcoat and sat down. As he began his work he realized, to his own intense surprise, that he was keen on the job!

CHAPTER XXVIII

I SHALL be very sorry not to see you any more, Mr. Rowe. All these delightful walks and talks ——"

Felix seemed to look at Lee Brainard from some far-away point which didn't show her to him clearly. He realized that she was expecting him to say something definite about seeing her again; about letters and visits. He understood perfectly that this was the moment when he should say, in a low tone of meaning: "These walks and talks have been only the beginning, I hope, of our acquaintance—our friendship. I shall write, if I may——" And so on.

He couldn't do it. She wasn't in his thoughts or his plans. She had contributed a rather pleasant interlude in his sober experience, that was all. His whole outlook now was in the direction of action, work, getting back somehow into the world of achievement. Romance had had its brief, unhappy fling with him —if one might call the episode of his hasty marriage by such a name. In any case, if he would retrieve himself he must do no more philandering.

"You've been mighty kind," he said to Lee. Dressed for her journey back to college with Rusty,

she had followed him into the hall, while the others were still gathered about the fireside. He had started for his room to get for Rusty a magazine which at the breakfast table she had been discussing with him. Lee, her face very rosy through her artful veil—her theory being that one could and should always rouge heavily if one were wearing a veil—had halted him upon the bottom step of the stairs.

"It's been a pleasure to be kind," the sweet, slow voice said. "I've learned so much from you—much more than I've learned about you. It seems a pity for it all to end right here, doesn't it?"

Well, there were just two things he could do. Once, without hesitation, Felix would have used the easy method of the man of the world, and have answered suavely: "Why speak of its ending, Miss Brainard? I assure you I sha'n't forget. I shall be coming your way some time. Perhaps you'll let me stop over a train?"

Now, somehow, he couldn't say that. His only other course was the truth. Not the whole truth—he couldn't blurt out the story of his bitter experience here at the parting. But he could let her see, as she must see, if he did it with any tact at all, that he didn't mean to pursue the acquaintance. He braced himself and spoke as, before he knew the Redfields, he would never have dreamed of speaking.

"Miss Brainard, I've been ill, as you know—men-

tally and—we may as well call it spiritually. I think I've just come to myself. I've been guilty of three years of idleness, and of seeing everything the wrong way. My one thought now is to go to work. I'm really beginning all over again. Wish me well, won't you?"

Even Lee, experienced in the ways of men, could find nothing to reply to this except a rather weak, "Why, of course!"

"Thank you. I knew you would." And so Felix escaped up the stairs, not to return till the sound of voices in the hall below proclaimed the imminent departure of the young people. Nick, Jerry, and Jinny were leaving, too—it was a pleasant hubbub. Felix ran down with his magazine.

Rusty shook hands with him more cordially than he could have expected; he didn't yet know just how he stood with Rusty.

"Good luck to you, Mr. Rowe," she said. "Keep the typewriter oiled, and don't forget the uses of the fountain pen and the note-book. I know that sounds like advice from the cat to the king! But you'll make your reputation all over again if you stay by the *Arrow* for a while. It's going to shoot a long way!"

"Thanks. I intend to stay," he answered. "I'll be Carter's office boy before I'll leave it—or him."

The look he got for that was so full of approving fire that he was still recalling it long after she had gone.

CHAPTER XXIX

FROM Andrew Carter to Ruth Rust Redfield:

DEAR RUSTY:

It seems a couple of years since I saw your gorgeous little head departing from the station. A lot has happened since that day, a week ago. To begin with: it seems that our friend Felix went to church for the first time in a considerable interval. It was the Stone Church, and he went with your Cousin Red. I never shall know exactly what happened. Robert Black isn't at all what is called an "evangelistic preacher." But Rowe came away a transformed man. According to himself, however, it didn't really happen in the twinkling of an eye, but was the result of a cumulative effect upon him of many things, Mr. Black or whatever he said in his sermon being merely the last in the sequence. To put that sequence as Rowe stated it briefly to me, I should say it piled up about like this: your mother, your father, your grandfather, the life in your home, Dr. R. P. Burns, yourself, myself (for the life of me I don't see how I came into it, but he vows it), and lastly the reunion with his friend the ex-chaplain,

who on Sunday morning said the word that brought him up standing. Anyhow, this is what happened to-day, Wednesday, three days after that Sunday:

Rowe came rushing into my office, and on my word I didn't know the fellow. "All warmed up" hardly expresses it. Instead of the sepulchral-faced individual who seemed to be barely able to endure his own existence, here was a man alive. Instead of a reserved, slow-spoken invalid with a perpetual grouch, here was an eager-eyed, keen-faced chap who was all on fire to change things and to change 'em quick. Well! And this is what he wants to do:

Start a small magazine supplement to the *Arrow* and edit it himself. Not any syndicate stuff, understand, but an original magazine, a certain substantial proportion of it written by Felix Rowe. A small affair at first, as a try-out, but with the ambition to be something new under the sun, since village weeklies don't aspire to anything like that. He vows the *Arrow* is an unusual village paper. (Yes, my dear, we knew that, didn't we? The only difficulty has been to make anybody else know it.) He thinks he can give it not only a local circulation but a country-wide one—or bigger. With his supplement, which is to be conducted on modern lines—no trash, no cheap stuff, but real articles, real book reviews, real poetry, and so on—he aims at nothing lower than the stars! And yet—to interest real people.

Well, Rusty, being a plain and practical chap, all this sounds to me as delirious and improbable as an opium dream, and yet I admit my pulse beats the faster for listening to Rowe talk about it. You see, he has some capital of his own to invest, so isn't asking me to risk anything except the collapse of our combined hopes. He wants to stay on at your home and live between it and the *Arrow* office, and to give his plan at least a year's trial. He says he isn't fit to go back to the old hectic life, but is sure he can regain his health and usefulness if he stays with the people who, he insists, have put him on his feet. We certainly didn't know he was so crazy over us all, did we?

And now comes the biggest thing I have to tell you. Lord, but it's a corker! He told it to me, straight out, without any backing and filling. He wants us all to know it—your family, the Burnses, the Blacks, and myself. Not necessary to spread it further than that, for it's past history and nobody concerned. But to start right he felt we all had to know.

[At this point in Carter's letter followed the paragraph which told Felix's unhappy story, in its bare outlines, which was the way Felix had told it to him. To him also Felix had made plain that the whole thing had long been to him a sort of nightmare

dream, from which he had awakened to find it no dream but a series of facts with which he had to reckon. Carter's comments on what he had been told interested Rusty even more than the breath-taking tale.]

You know, Rusty, if you could see him now, you'd feel as if you were looking at a sort of miracle. We got so used to that long face of his, that frown between his heavy eyes, that bored-to-death manner, that voice, so low that you had to strain your ears to hear it, we thought we knew the chap like a book, and that he was about the dullest book we ever were told we ought to read. Even when he waked up enough to write that amazing article contrasting the small-town editor of the weekly paper with the chief of the big city daily—which of course we recognized as top-notch work of its kind—we didn't change our opinion of him. To us he continued to be a more or less self-made invalid who wouldn't use the genius that was in him, except in an emergency which fairly forced him to do a bit of work, and so he continued to be negligible. I'll frankly admit that, even after he'd helped me out to that extent, I didn't expect anything more of him, and I was looking forward to the time when he'd cease taking up room in your home.

But now! My word! Rusty, he's a different fellow.

I don't know whether it's the lifting of this load from his conscience—I suppose that's really it—Robert Black says it is, and I suppose a thing like that could get tremendously on a man's nerves. But one thing is certain—he's somebody we haven't known, and we've got to get acquainted.

I wish you could hear him talk about your family—I mean your father and mother and grandfather—for they are the ones that have made the deep impression on him. We were tramping down the road together last night, and he let go a little, with me listening for all I was worth. You don't need me to tell you what *I* think about your family, but to hear him say it was worth a big sum of money.

"I tried not to let them get under my skin," he said, "but little by little they did it, in spite of me. That blind man—at first I tried not to look at him nor listen to him. I didn't believe in him, you know."—I can see Rowe's face now as he said that, turned toward me with the winter light on it showing up every changing line.—"I didn't intend to believe in him. Nobody could take a blow like that—losing one's eyes in the prime of life—and be really as resigned and patient as he seemed. I was sure he let off sometimes—swore at the Creator and the universe—hated everybody and everything, as I did. After a while I got to trying to catch him at it—coming in on him unexpectedly when he was alone—

even—yes, I was guilty of that—listening at his door more than once. Well, at last I did hear him addressing his Maker—and I listened eagerly enough for a touch of blasphemy. That was what I wanted to hear, Carter. What I got was his voice saying over and over, 'Oh, God, give me courage to bear it and not let them know what it is to me.'"

That got Rowe, as it would anybody, because it was no pose, just an out-and-out appeal to Someone the blind man felt was bigger than he, Who could help him buck up. He did buck up, too—Rowe said he could feel it in his voice when he came back into the room.——Well, then the deaf old man—he had his effect on Rowe, too, as he says, though a quite different one. Old as he is, your grandfather's still the flaming type, you know—can get tremendously worked up over things, as the old files of the paper when he edited it show plainly enough. Some of his columns were written with acid, some with electricity, and some, perhaps the most effective, with a sort of invisible ink that had a way of coming out about the second or third time you read the thing and began to get the bite of it. You know these qualities and abilities still show in the old man, and Rowe heard him, now and then, when something he'd read in one of the big dailies he takes stirred him. He'd get up and walk the floor and explode, all by himself, or to your father, and the things

he said always showed the calibre of the man. Keen and searching in his judgments, and always and for ever on the side of right as he saw it—on the side of fairness and equity and justice for the oppressed, and so on. You couldn't find any holes in his logic, either, Rowe said, even when you didn't altogether agree with him.

Then your mother, Rusty—I don't know but most of all your mother. You should hear him speak of her. He doesn't say so much—doesn't rave—just says quietly: "You know what she is, Carter. There's something about her that makes you want to compel her respect. I felt it from the first hour, but I tried *not* to feel it. It isn't the ordinary influence of the maternal upon a man—which isn't always what it's supposed to be, you know. It's the power that lies in force of character, in a fine mind, in the realization that she understands a lot of things about you and takes them into account in her dealing with you in a perfectly fair way, as the best sort of man might. I don't suppose she's perfect—as a matter of fact she can be perfectly scathing when she lets herself go (it doesn't happen often). But you do feel in her a magnificent self-control, like a harnessed stream, and you do want her to find something in you worth her consideration. I don't know why I fought so long against this personality of hers, trying not to let it get hold of me, doing my best to keep her

opinion of me as low as possible. But it kept telling on me, just the same."

Well, Rusty, I can't put it all into one letter, but you can see I'm full of it. Work on the old paper's going to be much more interesting with this high-powered current turned on in the office. We've rigged up a desk for Rowe, which he hasn't sat at much yet, he's been so busy telephoning, telegraphing, getting things in shape to begin. He'd like to tear out the old Goss flat-bed press right now and get in the latest word in electric-run presses, but he's willing to compromise on taking out the gasoline-run engine and wiring up for electricity. And so on. Doesn't it scare you? Not you! I know it makes you tingle, as it does me. At last I've found a partner who's visionary enough to suit me, one with an imagination that goes me one better. We may not make a success of it, but we're going to have a lot of fun, and we're not going to worry ourselves to death in any case. And Rusty, when I remember that this Pegasus who's hitched himself to my plough is a Pegasus who *has* made good on the race course, who has a reputation not yet forgotten in the newspaper world, whose public was a big one, whose column was one of the most brilliant and famous known, I can't help thinking that little magazine of his will bring readers to our door, even up here in the woods. And if, in due course, as is to be

expected in the nature of things, after a year or so he gets the wornout wings of Pegasus mended and strong again and flies away, he'll have left us something worth having. And meanwhile—you're coming home in June, and if a place for you can't be found in our plans, then the best and most beautiful dreams won't come true. But they will—if *you* will.

Yours always,
ANDY.

From Ruth Rust Redfield to Andrew Carter:

DEAR ANDY:

Really, I'm all "tingling," as you wanted me to be. But not half so much over the wintry boarder's sudden emergence into Spring and sanity, and his plans for the future, as over his tributes to my blessed family. I wanted to kill him, when I was at home, for his indifference to them. I could forgive him much for those discerning words about them, all three, belated though his recognition is. Somehow I don't want to comment on his past nor to say much about him, anyway. Maybe he'll redeem himself, though I haven't quite the faith in him you have. You always were a hopeful beggar, Andy Carter. You never'd have bought the *Arrow* when it was at the bottom of its luck if you'd hadn't been willing to take a chance on pulling it out of the deep hole where it was stuck.

Well, you're pulling it out—I'll have to admit that. Whether the new feathers of the magazine section will overweight the shaft or send it straight to the target remains to be seen. But I agree with you that anyway you'll have a great time drawing your bow and watching that target. You know you're really not more than half grown up, anyway, Andy—nor ever will be. Anybody who can look as happy as you do with his face all grime, fixing a broken-down press, doesn't need to grow up—he's got all the fun cornered in his own back yard!

But you don't want me to talk about you. And I do want to talk a bit about myself—what I'm to do when I get through my senior year. You soar away about a job for me on the *Arrow*. For goodness sake, what job? Going to dismiss Shep and put me on the linotype? Or make me office devil, so you can keep the editor's face clean? I tell you I want a real job, and it's got to be in my home town, for a while at least, for I'm not going to see my wonderful mother gradually break down for want of help from the daughter she's skimped and saved to put through college. And I'm mighty weary of the boarder business the way we've practised it. The thing I've got in my head is this:

I want to start a school in our house—a school for girls in our village and locality who want more

or less of a college education but can't go to college. Not a big school—perhaps not more than eighteen or twenty in all. Mother to be head, I to be hands and feet. A day school, you understand—we couldn't board them. Mother would love it, and she's wonderfully equipped for the work. You know she was a teacher once; she adores teaching. Instead of drudging in the kitchen she'd shine in the classroom. Who'd do the kitchen work? I hear you ask. Why, we'd be able to employ someone for that, for we should charge a pretty good price for our tuition.

Now why not, Andy Carter? This plan is no more visionary than yours and Mr. Felix Rowe's for that magazine, and besides, you *like* visionary people, you know. Why shouldn't I make use of a perfectly good college education by trying an interesting experiment like this with it? Maybe the thing's been done, but I don't know it, if it has. We know families for twenty miles around—prosperous, ambitious families; but not very many of their children go to college. They all know the Redfields, and everybody who ever came into contact with Mother would welcome the idea of contact with her every day in the week. The trolley connects us up with dozens of such people, and the rest have cars—they could get here all right.

I haven't time to put all the details into a letter,

but I assure you I've thought them through pretty thoroughly. The point isn't that it would be a great money-making scheme, for of course it wouldn't. But it would give us plenty to live on, and—*here's my point:* It would give Mother something splendid to do with her great powers, something that would absorb her, yet she wouldn't have to neglect Father or Granddaddy to do it. You will say she's giving herself to the whole community now. So she is, as far as she can get the time, but she has to do this back-breaking summer-boarder thing (which I know she detests as I do) to get money enough to live on, and the community service she renders isn't a patch on the use she could be in this way I've thought out, not to mention the happiness she'd have in an entirely new line of effort, fitted to her ability.

Mother could teach the things she majored on in college years ago, and which she's kept up wonderfully, and could brush up on in no time. She'd be a wonder at English literature, at ancient and modern history, at economics. I'm something of a shark at mathematics and I make a fair record in the sciences. Do I hear you put a disconcerting question about fitting up a laboratory with expensive chemicals? Well, you are to understand that it's not an actual four-years' college course I'm aiming at—we couldn't give that, I know. But we could

give a two-years' course in the big subjects one needs to feel educated, and we could add a practical class or two in things like domestic science, dressmaking, and millinery. I suppose it's really more of a graduate high-school course I'm planning than an intensive college course, yet I want to put the college feeling into it, for the sake of the many, many girls who long for just that thing, yet can't possibly have it, or wouldn't be permitted to go away from home to get it.

Write me what you think of it, Andy, please. And don't come down on it hard, will you? Use your glorious imagination to picture the Redfield School; Marcia Redfield, Head; Ruth Redfield, Dep't. of Science, and so on. Yes, we might have to employ an extra teacher or two—I know where I could get 'em, from among my classmates.

This is positively all. I've cut a class to finish and get it off.

Your red-headed friend,
RUSTY.

From Andrew Carter to Ruth Rust Redfield:

RUSTY DEAREST:

You *won't!* Oh, you *can't!* Why, I've been just living to have you get through college and come home to me. To talk of going into a great scheme of work like that, to tie yourself up to it for years

to come—how can you think I'd favour it? Why, Nick and Jerry can take care of the family expenses from now on; you know they can. Your mother won't have to slave at keeping summer boarders, once the boys are home, or even if they get jobs elsewhere. The big tug of war is over now: you're all through college. You're free as air to marry me. Won't you—won't you, Rusty?

You'll say you never knew I wanted you—it would be just like you to say that. Well, I haven't put it into so many words, because I knew you didn't want me to. It would have been like trying to put a bridle on a colt to try to tie a girl like you while you were at school. So I've carefully avoïded even a suggestion of what our fathers called love-making, and our grandfathers called courtship. But I thought—yes, I thought—somehow you knew, by a thousand signs, what I was waiting for. I've played the good comrade all these years, haven't I? I've walked with you and talked with you, miles on end. I've written reams on reams. I've told you every thought, every hope, every plan. And all the while my heart was as much under your feet as if I'd taken it out in your presence and placed it there for you to plant your little brown brogues upon. Didn't you know that, Rusty? Don't tell me you didn't. Is the school plan just a bluff, then? But no, you won't like that. I take it back. I know

you mean it. Indeed, I'm worried to death that you mean it!

Yours always,
ANDY.

Rusty to Andy:

WHY, ANDY CARTER!

Who would have thought it? Of course I didn't know you felt *that* way about our ancient and honourable friendship! That is, to be strictly honest, as I ought to be, I didn't know you were just waiting for me to be through school to spring the idea of marriage. There's so much to do before I shall get around to talk about anything like that—if I ever do. Of course I like you tremendously, Andy, as you perfectly well know; but somehow I'm not ready to settle down with you or anybody else. I think I *ought* to do something with my hard-won college work—something as well worth doing as the scheme I've outlined to you. I hoped you'd be all for it—imagined you teaching a class in journalism—or at least English composition. Because, of course, Andy, you do write mighty vivid, quick-moving English, and I believe you could impart something of your way of putting things to young people who think of a letter only as a means of conveying information.

Let's just go along as we are—I like that so much.

Of course, if you insist on a definite answer I shall have to give it, but I'm hoping you won't do that. It really wouldn't be wise of you—I'll give you that pointer. But—please don't be hurt, or too disappointed. I don't want to get along without your friendship, or feel shaky over consulting you every other minute, as I always have.

I really am shocked, but I'm

Your sensible friend,

RUSTY.

Andy to Rusty:

DEAR RUSTY:

All right. We'll go along "as we are"—if you know exactly what that means. I'll keep everything under, so far as I can. But you may as well know that I don't intend to let go for a minute of the idea that you'll come to me in the end. Perhaps it's not wise of me to give you any such "pointer" as that in return for yours; it may simply make your little red head flame. (I rather like it when it's flaming, even though I do get burned!)

About the Redfield School. Go ahead, with my blessing. I'll say no more against it. I'll give you all the advertising space you need to boom it. I'll print your circular letters and mail them for you. I'm not sure that I'll teach a class in English composition for you, but I'll agree to come over and

give impressive weekly lectures. I'll buy a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles for the purpose, and be as caustic as you please over the selected themes you hand me for inspection, to show what your students are doing. And I'll hand-write your diplomas on sheepskin. Could friend do more?

Of course, to be strictly honest, Rusty, I'll have to say I think the scheme an impossible one. You say you've thought it out, but its habitation is in the clouds, just the same. You haven't an idea what it means to make such a project go. But, try it—try it—I know what it means to have one's brain on fire with wild ideas for big things. You might as well try one thing as another in order to get down to earth.

Mind my saying I love you?

World without end,

ANDY.

CHAPTER XXX

"DOCTOR BURNS,"—the voice came rather sharply over the telephone—"could you come and see Andrew Carter? I'm afraid he's pretty sick. He admits he had a terrific chill in the night. I know you're not doing outside practice, but I can't get him to have the local man out here, and he won't go to bed, where I know he ought to be. I believe you could manage him. Nobody else can. If you'd make him just one visit——"

"All right, Rowe, I'll come."

Felix hung up the receiver with a sense of relief. He was just in time, for Carter came back into the office from the pressroom as Felix got his answer. Carter was trying to walk straight like a man whose legs were of use to him, but it was a difficult matter, he felt so groggy. He sat down at the desk across from Felix, and propping his head on one hand went back to work—at least, the semblance of work, though his head ached so throbbingly that the words of the rural correspondent he was reading ran together before his bloodshot eyes. Felix, apparently deep in his own work, kept track of the rapid, slightly laboured breathing opposite, his anxious

thoughts brought to a focus every now and then by a short, dry cough which Carter tried in vain to control, and which sounded to the listener altogether too suggestive of coming serious trouble—indeed of trouble already dangerously present. As he had told Burns, he had tried in vain to get Carter to give up and go to bed. There was a fight on in the village over the question of the water supply, and the *Arrow* had been taking a vigorous and influential part. The matter was to come to a head at a village meeting to be held two days hence, and Carter was bringing every energy to bear on the issue of the paper to come out on the day before this crisis. Give up now and go to bed? He guessed not. When Felix had urged it he had told *him* where to go in no uncertain terms.

But Dr. R. P. Burns would fix things, Felix was confident, and his ears were alert for the sound of the Doctor's car. When he heard it, though he didn't move a muscle, he breathed a sigh of satisfaction.

The door opened. "Hello!" said a well-known voice.

Carter looked up. "Hello!" he tried to say, in a tone equally indicative of energy. The word was cut in two by that confounded cough of his which hadn't let him alone now for days. It hurt like blazes to cough, too.

Burns came along up to the desk and helped him-

self to a chair near Carter's. His experienced eye needed but a sharp glance to have the suggestiveness of the sound of that cough confirmed—Carter was really ill. He leaned forward and took hold of Carter's wrist, fingers on leaping pulse. Carter gave him one look, then his angry eyes turned daggers on Felix, who after a nod at the Doctor seemed to be going composedly ahead with his own work, which he did not see at all.

"This is your doing, blame you!" Carter ejaculated hoarsely.

Felix nodded. "You're right it is."

Well, there wasn't much use trying to resist Doctor Burns, once he was on the job. Carter had to submit to a thermometer under his tongue; had to permit a needle in his arm for the securing of a specimen of his blood; had to strip off his coat and expose his trunk to the findings of a scientifically trained ear plus an inquisitively competent stethoscope; and finally, flushed and wretched, had to listen to the deadly finality of the Doctor's pronouncement.

"Bed's the only place for you, if you value your life. If you don't, there are a few of us who do, and to bed you're going."

"I won't. Not till this issue is out, anyhow." Carter was dogged. He put on his coat with shaking fingers.

"Rowe'll take care of this issue, man. Don't be a fool. The only question before the house is where to put you. Staying upstairs alone here's no good. The hospitals are crowded to the roofs—not half enough nurses—there's more or less of an influenza epidemic on, and a mean form of it, at that. The place for you—excuse me——" And he pulled the telephone toward him.

Carter might protest, might smotheredly swear at him, but the Doctor sat back comfortably in his chair and talked to his cousin, Marcia Redfield. He put the case in a nutshell, and his eye brightened as he heard the quick answer he expected. His closing sentences made Felix as triumphant as they made Carter despairing:

"You're a brick, Marcia, as I knew you would be. I'll have him over in half an hour. Give him your warmest, sunniest, airiest—what's that?—Wait a minute——" He put a question to Felix—put it confidently. "Give him your room?" he asked. "That's the one I want."

"Of course. By all means." (Would Rusty have believed the wintry boarder could answer with such spring-like warmth?)

Carter tried to protest again. Felix made a gesture which cut his rasping words in two. The Doctor finished speaking, and hung up.

"We'll give you half an hour," he said, "to put

things in order, and then—— Hello, there—a chill again?"

For Carter was shaking violently, though the office was hot with the fires Felix had himself set blazing when he saw his friend's condition. It was rather a nervous chill, however, than a bodily one, and he overcame it shortly. He set his teeth and ran through the article in his hand, dictated a letter which Felix transcribed, and then, weak but raging because he was being commanded, coerced, overcome by the force of Burns's will, got into his overcoat and went with the Doctor out to his car.

"Don't you worry for a minute, old man," had been Felix's parting message. "I'll sit so tight on this job it won't know you're off it. And I'll be over at the house to-night to look after you."

As the pair left the room, with these words following them, Burns gave Felix an interested look. Could this alert chap, speaking in such a voice of hearty friendliness, possibly be the nervous invalid he had brought to the Redfields' just six months ago? For it was March now, only two months since the scene in Black's study, yet Felix seemed all made over new already. It showed, Burns said to himself, how quickly the outward human creature registers its response to the real change in its inner life.

CHAPTER XXXI

WELL, Carter had to admit that the bed felt comfortable, and that it was almost worth being sick to be taken care of like that. As, between warm blankets, he realized what it meant to have the hand of a nurse like Mrs. Redfield skilfully administer a hot sponge bath to his feverish body, he understood that he couldn't have kept going much longer without help. And such help as she could give he had never happened to know.

Burns, at the foot of his bed, watched the giving of the bath. He was hanging round, as he frankly admitted to himself, for the sheer fun of seeing a splendid fellow like Andy Carter, who had been an orphan all his life, discover what it was like to have a mother for once in his experience.

"That's the thing! That'll bring his fever down long enough to give him a bit of relaxation. Now for orders. I'll give you yours outside. But before I go"—Burns addressed the patient—"here are a few for you, young man. And they're all comprised in one—give yourself up absolutely to Mrs. Redfield's care. She's one nurse in a thousand, though she holds no diploma from the training schools. Don't

disobey a thing she tells you to do—or not to do. And don't worry about that paper."

"I shall worry about it," Carter muttered.

"Then you'll be an idiot. To tell you the truth, you couldn't do Rowe a bigger favour than by leaving him in charge of things for a bit. He's competent, and I believe he's trustworthy. The responsibility is the best thing that could happen to him. He won't let you down—he won't let the *Arrow* down. And if he offers to look after you nights over here, don't refuse. He can sleep across the hall, with the doors open. It won't hurt him a particle, and Mrs. Redfield can't be up night and day."

"I sha'n't need—anybody—nights——" Carter got it out between efforts not to cough. "I've been—sick before—and nobody even knew it."

"I'll bet they didn't. But they do now, and a good thing for you they do. And I hope you won't need anybody nights. But it's not an uncomfortable thing to have somebody within speaking distance, and you don't have to rebel. Now, I'll be off when I've had a word with Mrs. Redfield. And I'll see you to-morrow."

"I thought you didn't practise—any more—except consultation work."

A gay, defiant light came into Burns's eye. "I don't," he said, "not so Max Buller can notice it. But now and then I keep my hand in and put one

over on my professional brother and dragon-friend by dropping in daily as a sort of consultant-in-charge —which is an office I've created for myself—do you see? In the present instance I'll consult with Mrs. Redfield, who is in reality your physician. So be aisy, man, be aisy. Having an excuse to drive out here every day is a gorgeous happening for me, and that's all there is of that. Good-bye, and make up your mind to be good."

Downstairs it was with a difference that Red spoke his mind to Marcia. "It's going to be a stiff case," he said, "or I don't know the signs. It's too late to get in ahead of a pretty serious involvement. The fellow must have been half sick for a week. Perhaps I'm wrong to put him on you, Marcia, but I knew——"

"You knew," she said, in her straightforward way, "I'd welcome the chance to be of such use, precisely as you do yourself. I'm very fond of Andy. I'd as soon send my own son to an overcrowded hospital where he couldn't have a special nurse, as see Andy go there. So it's all right. And if, as you think, it's a stiff fight that's coming, it will be a comfort to have it here, instead of getting reports of it from somewhere else."

"You're the stuff," Burns responded, with his hand closing tight over hers, "of which fighters are made. I can ask nothing better than to be on the firing line—with you."

CHAPTER XXXII

WHEN the thing had been going on some days, Carter—himself also engaged in fighting—for breath, for endurance of the agonizing pain which racked him, for control of his mind, which persisted in presenting him with unpleasant visions of his future—began to realize that two people were devoting most of their time to him, watch and watch. During the day it was Mrs. Redfield, in fresh-looking blue and white, her face always serene, her voice always quietly cheerful; it was as if she had no other duties about the house, so constantly was she within call. At night—well, it was at night that almost from the first Carter had been more or less confused as to who it was who gave him his nourishment or medicine, who eased his position, or laid a comforting hand upon his arm with a low-murmured: "Sorry, old chap. Better to-morrow, maybe." He had known, of course, in the beginning, that Felix had taken up his quarters across the hall—or so he was given to understand. But if so it was astonishing, if he had had brains enough left to think about it, how quickly that person who attended him at night was able to get across the considerable

distance to his side at the slightest indication of a need. It could hardly be Felix every time, could it?

In any case, Felix lived in a dressing gown those nights, and if his head touched a pillow it was not for more than forty winks. It may be observed, in passing, that the dressing gown was not that gorgeous embroidered blue affair with which his mother had presented him, but one of his own selection, its black silk chastely elegant, its outlines shapely. To Carter's vision, blurred with fever, that robe came to seem the habit of a monk, and his attendant some sort of priest, with a cool, efficient hand, and a seeming knowledge of what the sufferer wanted at the very moment of his wanting it. Curious, all this, in view of the fact that previous to this crisis nobody in the house would have dreamed of putting Felix Rowe in charge of a sick cat, let alone a dangerously sick man with a life to preserve as valuable as that of Andrew Carter.

Red himself certainly would never have dreamed of trusting his patient through those difficult and increasingly trying first nights to this other patient of his, himself but just recovering from a disease more deadly than pneumonia, if it had not been for something Robert Black said to him. Black had gone at once with Red to visit Carter, and coming away, observed:

"I'm glad to hear that Rowe's to be in charge nights."

Red had interrupted. "Nominally in charge, but I've no doubt Mrs. Redfield will be up two or three times a night, and can be summoned at a moment's notice. Of course, I'd get a nurse for him if I could, but, by jolly, the shortage of nurses is awful. Fewer go into the training schools every year, or so it seems, and when a winter of epidemic is on, like this, and a quarter of the nurses sick themselves, by turns, one has to take what can be had. Rowe's intelligent enough, of course, but I can't just imagine him sacrificing his own sleep for more than a night or two before he calls for help. Long before the crisis is on Linc Redfield or old Grandfather'll be sitting by that bed, to give Marcia a chance for rest. But I'll have found somebody else anyhow in a day or two, and Rowe can go to bed in peace."

"What an old cynic you're getting to be!" Black had declared. "You'll find Rowe pretty dogged about giving up and going to bed, if there's anything of the fellow I knew left in him. There is, and he'll surprise you."

He did precisely that. At the beginning of the fourth night, when Carter had had an unpromising day and Red had been a long way from satisfied with his condition, the Doctor had quietly put his

car into the old Redfield barn, and had camped down on the couch in the sitting-room. Only Marcia had known that he remained, and he had sent her to bed with a command which couldn't be disobeyed.

"Save your strength—you'll need it before we're through. I'm going to stay, and I'll look in on the sick lad now and then. If I need you I'll get you up in a jiffy, never fear."

"But, Red, this is precisely the kind of thing you've been forbidden to do," Marcia remonstrated. "Ellen will be anxious."

"I'll call her and explain. She knows well enough that once in a while the only way is to give me my head, or I'll chafe and be worse off. I couldn't go home and to sleep with the sound of that breathing in my ears; it would be louder nineteen miles away than it is here, and I think it shakes the house as it is. Run along, Marcia dear—you're dog-tired and I'm fresh."

She had had to go, but she set out food for him to partake of in the night, and promised herself to wake in an hour or two, whether called or not. He settled himself, but it wasn't long before he was softly up the stairs, to find Felix on guard with wide-open eyes. There was nothing to be done, he knew, but wait, and Felix hadn't seen him peep in, so he went down again. He was back upstairs at midnight, to find the same conditions and the same watchfulness.

Red himself fell asleep then, for a while, to waken suddenly with the sense of having been caught off his guard. He slipped upstairs for the third time, with the fearsome sound of the hurried, difficult breathing in his ears, and the conviction that he should find the untrained nurse asleep at his post. As he passed the old clock in the hall he saw that it was after two in the morning.

Asleep? Nothing of the sort. Instead, the black-gowned form was bending low over the bed, and Red saw that Felix's fingers were on Carter's pulse. A moment later he saw the figures entered on the chart. He saw the medicine given, the form of Carter gently changed in position, according to directions. Then, he not only saw but heard, first, a hoarse word from Carter, then in the gentlest, most unflurried tone in the world:

"I know. But it's getting toward morning now, and then there'll be another night behind us. I'm right here, old man, and I won't leave you for a minute. I *like* to be here, Carter, you know."

There was no answer, but Red knew the spirit of a man he hadn't reckoned with had spoken in those few soothing words. They had the desired effect, too, for Carter ceased for a little a certain restless moving of his head, and kept it, for a time, turned toward the black-gowned figure. Then the watcher saw one thing more—that Felix, as he sat down again,

brought his own face where the faint light from the night lamp could slightly illumine it, as if to try what it might be to Carter's half-delirious vision to rest it upon the face of a friend.

Then Red came softly in. He stood looking down at Carter, studying the signs critically. The fight was going hard, no doubt of that, as it is apt to do with the young and strong. Was the patient going to pull through or be beaten? There was little that could be done, all told, to help him. It was his own constitution, his own clean and healthy blood that must save him, if he was to be saved. Nursing counts far more than medicine, in such cases, and Carter was having the best of that. Also, his physician had no doubt of the cleanness of that blood; he'd stake a good deal on Carter's having steered a straight course with his life; by every sign he was that sort of chap. But—both lungs were involved, and the labouring heart was having a bad time of it to do its work—the congested face and nostrils dilating with each breath testified to that. Red's fingers dropped upon the bounding pulse. He'd rather have it bounding than slacking away, growing faint, intermittent—ceasing. He turned away abruptly. A good doctor doesn't let his imagination undermine him, well as he may know what he is facing.

Now he looked at Felix. The figure in the black

silk gown had risen to his feet. While the Doctor had been studying his patient the attendant had been studying the Doctor. Red's face was as inscrutable as that of any man of his profession, but there was no discounting his interest in the case. The two pairs of eyes met and went rather deep into each other. The thing which leaped from eye to eye was a mutual purpose: "He's *got* to win out, he can't be spared." And, at last, Red admitted to himself that here was a man, an ally, one on whom he could count. From that moment his faith in Felix Rowe took root and grew.

Red paused a moment to examine the chart. Then, as if by agreement, the two walked away from the bed, out into the hall. Red softly closed the door, all but a crack.

"He's holding his own," he said, "no worse, but the crisis isn't in sight. He's got to keep on holding, probably, awhile longer. Meanwhile—I wonder if there's anybody we ought to let know. His family were all gone years ago. I must ask Marcia Redfield—she'll know. If there is anybody he'd want to see, it wouldn't be right to take chances any longer."

Felix's look held his steadily. "Doctor," he said, "I think I ought to tell you that when he's a bit off his head, when his fever's at its height, he keeps trying to talk about—Rusty. Never any other time."

Red's eyebrows went up. "He's known her all his life," he said. "I didn't suppose there was anything more than good friendship between them. There's that, I know."

"I think she ought to be told," said Felix, and he said it with conviction in his low tone.

"Have you mentioned it to her mother?"

"No. I didn't feel at liberty. But when you asked if there was anybody who ought to be sent for——"

"I see. Well, if you think there's a definite attraction there, perhaps it should be done. I'll speak to Mrs. Redfield in the morning."

"Thanks," said Felix.

When he went back to the bedside, the Doctor having gone downstairs again, he sat for a long time with his eyes fixed on Carter's face. Then he got up again and went over to the window, and stood staring out into the darkness of the March night. Over in the village here and there a light showed, but all the rest was blackness, for it was "the dark of the moon," as he had heard country people say.

If there *was* "anything between them," to Felix's mind Carter lying there, fighting for his life, would be, more than ordinary mortals, out of luck if the decision went against him. For he would have to leave Rusty Redfield in the world behind him.

CHAPTER XXXIII

RUSTY REDFIELD, poised on the threshold of her little apartment, just off to the most important class of the week, answered the telephone impatiently. She had all but let the call go, but the ever-present possibility of a summons from home because of some unexpected catastrophe overcame her will to be off, as usual.

"Long distance, Miss Redfield," came back the hall-boy's voice. "Just a minute."

Rusty's heart stopped beating. Long-distance calls were not frequent in her experience; the family, though but two hundred miles away, seldom went to that extravagance when a special delivery letter would do. She knew of nobody else likely to call her from afar. She waited anxiously. The call was annoyingly delayed; the operator kept trying to put her through and then shut her off again with that maddening "Just a minute." But at last a clear voice reached her—a man's voice she didn't recognize.

"Miss Redfield?"

"Yes"—breathlessly. "What is it? *Who* is it?"

"It's Felix Rowe. Your family are all perfectly

well. But Carter is pretty sick, in your home, and your mother gave me permission to call you."

"*Who* is sick?"

"Andy Carter. He has pneumonia, a stiff case. They didn't write to you of it as long as he was doing well, not to bother your work. He's not doing quite so well now, though he's by no means hopeless—Doctor Burns says he has a good fighting chance. We think—Carter would like mighty well to see you."

He didn't tell her—how could he?—that all they had to go on was that rasping mutter of her name when Carter was just over the edge from self-control.

Rusty's answer came back instantly: "I'll start at once."

Felix's reply to this was to mention a train. He had worked out the most feasible schedule for her on a time-table before he called her. It gave her an hour's leeway in which to make the train. He told her someone would meet her. Then: "We'll all be glad to see you," he assured her.

"Thank you," said Rusty, and hung up, her hand shaking as it had never shaken before in all her life. She regarded the hand wonderingly. Was it possible that the news of her friend Andy's serious illness—desperate illness, perhaps, for all Felix's guarded way of putting it—could make her heart turn over like this? Of course she cared, cared tremendously, but—why,

this was fright—this was panic—it was the instant knowledge that the thing mustn't happen, that it mustn't even come near happening, that she couldn't lose Andy. Why, she couldn't spare him out of her life! It was unthinkable—it was unendurable. Must she wait to take a train? She wished she could fly, at any cost. Why, anything might happen in the five hours which must elapse before she could possibly open the door of her own home. But she must not—*must not*—think of that, if she was to keep her head—that usually steady head, which now seemed to be whirling on her shoulders.

For one mad moment she thought of actually flying. There was an aviator who had been coursing about over the college campus every morning, writing smoke letters on the sky. She had often stopped to watch him. She knew he landed out on a field—somewhere. It might be possible to get hold of him. She could pay the price—any price. Then reasonableness came to the rescue. Andy couldn't be as near—couldn't be in as critical case as that—they'd have let her know before. Felix's voice had been steady and well-pitched, it wasn't an excited voice. But then, Felix—he didn't care—he never cared for anybody enough to get excited——

All the while, Rusty was tumbling things into a bag, telephoning to the college office, calling a taxi. In more than time for the train she was off, her

face sharp with anxiety, a prayer on her tight lips. "Oh, God, don't let him go—*please* don't let him go! Poor Andy—he's cared so *long*—and I—I've put him off so. He can't go—without me—he'd—he'd *die!*"

It was Cousin Red who met her at the station.

"Rowe couldn't get away," he said. "Andy's taken a most extraordinary notion of having him near by most of the time. Between Felix and your mother he's got all the chance there is. They're a pair, I promise you."

"How is he?" Rusty barely breathed the question.

"The fever's still holding, though the crisis can't be far away now. We thought he might like to see you—that it wouldn't be fair to you, in case it meant very much to you, not to let you know."

And Red looked at her sharply. Then he nodded. "I see," he said. "No need to tell me, Rusty. I thought he was just a friend. I see he's more. We don't look like that for just ordinary friends. All right. If you can keep a good grip on yourself we'll let you see him."

Rusty set her lips. "I will," she said, firmly.

"Of course you will. You're a Redfield," said Cousin Red.

"So are you," she answered, and gave him a pale little smile.

CHAPTER XXXIV

SO SHE saw him—Andy Carter—her old friend and good comrade, come to this pass, that he was lying there battling for breath and for his life. It didn't seem to her that anybody could live who looked like that. His face had a queer, purplish hue, and his eyes, as he turned them on her, seemed hardly to see her. At last, however, as she stood silently at the foot of the bed, watching those quick, short, panting breaths, she saw recognition appear in his face. She came to his side, dropped upon her knees, and took his hand in both hers, doing her best to smile at him in a way which should show she wasn't anxious. The smile he gave back to her was a pitiful effort, but it showed her he knew her and was glad to have her there. He didn't try to speak, but his fingers gave hers a little pressure.

Her mother took her away, presently. When they were alone Rusty's head dropped on her mother's shoulder, she hid her face there as she used to do when a child. Marcia Redfield's arms were about her.

"We haven't given him up by any means, dear," said the firm, quiet voice it was so good to hear—had

always been good to hear in any crisis. "I'm glad you came—it will help him to know you're near."

"Oh, Mother!" The young voice shook. "I thought—I might live my life without him—for a long time, anyhow. Now—I can't think of anything but just—he's got to live—he's *got* to. I can't *let* him go."

The strong, gentle hand which held her stroked her hair up from the neck, but her mother was silent. She couldn't tell Rusty that Andrew Carter would surely live—she didn't know. Nobody knew. When that crisis came which they were dreading, the sudden fall of temperature, there would come with it the test of strength, the strain on the heart which had laboured so hard and so long. Then would be the time of danger. And it wouldn't be over in an hour, or a day.

"In works of fiction," Red Pepper Burns had said gruffly when Felix had asked him if when Carter had passed the crisis they could be sure of him, "there's always a moment when the physician, turning dramatically from the patient's bedside, says in a hushed but confident voice, 'He will live!' It doesn't happen that way. That crisis, that sudden drop of temperature in a night, is like a flood of cold water on a fire that's been burning fiercely until the fuel has almost burned out. There's a spark left—embers—but they have to be nursed back carefully to a

blaze. It may be several days before we can be sure that the heart, weakened incredibly by the disease, is going to go on pumping. Meanwhile, care's the thing—not a particle of excitement. If he's reached that stage when Rusty gets here, she can't see him till he's past it."

So it was that after that first sight of him Rusty was kept away. For the crisis did come that night, as it happened, and before morning Felix's physician and his nurses were very anxious. Red, coming out of his room and finding himself drawn into Rusty's room, just down the hall, answered her whispered question with a certain severity which in him always meant tension.

"Can't tell—nobody can tell, this stage. Terribly weak—the thing's gone on too long before the break. We'll do our best, Rusty—that's all I can say. Buck up, my dear girl. It isn't like you to go to pieces—you mustn't do it now."

"I'm not going to pieces." She lifted her head staunchly—the words were like the flick of a lash across her face, as he had meant them to be. "If I could just *do* something! If you only would let me stay in the room and help——"

He shook his head. "You're much too exciting. He knows you're here—that's all he can bear. He'd try to speak to you—I wouldn't have it for a farm. You'll have to be patient."

"Promise"—she clung to his arm in a frightened way most unlike the girl he knew—"if——"

He nodded. "If he gets into any tight place I'll let you know."

She had to be content with that. She rushed away out of the house and down the garden, out of sight, and then rushed back again lest anything happen while she was away. She threw herself into the work of the house, feverishly sweeping and dusting for a time, only to fling down her implements and creep upstairs again, to listen at the closed door. And one of the most trying things she had to bear was the sight of Felix Rowe, going in and out of that door which she was forbidden to enter. The wintry boarder, at whom she had scoffed as an idler and a cumberer of the earth, was now of far more use than she herself.

He looked tired and worn, but it was with a difference. His eyes were no longer lack-lustre, they were sharp and clear with his intense interest in this strange new task. In spite of his obvious fatigue—and fatigue with a reason, though he had been sent to bed every morning at four, to sleep until he should wake of himself—he had been getting up at eight to hurry through his breakfast and rush over to the *Arrow* office. For the paper had not failed of publication on the Thursday after Carter's leaving, nor on the following Thursday; nor did Felix mean it to fail, though the worst should come. Somehow,

to him, the very biggest thing he could do for Carter was to get the paper out, and to let there be no falling off in its quality, such as Carter would hate.

On that first Thursday he had put in no notice of the editor's illness, but on the second he could not stay his hand. He wanted—what did he want? He knew well enough what it was—that the people who knew and cared for Carter should exercise in his behalf a certain means of help for him in which Felix himself had sometime professed unbelief—but not since he had known Robert Black. So in a prominent column he inserted these lines:

The editor of the *Arrow* is seriously ill with pneumonia at the home of Lincoln Redfield. It is his chief wish that in his absence from the office the paper should continue in its service to the community without a break. His deputy, as editor, wishes to recall at this time to the *Arrow's* patrons that there are few forces in Eastville equal to that of this newspaper, in the hands of Andrew Carter. For fair-dealing, for strong support of all righteous causes, and unswerving opposition to all schemes based upon unworthy motives of self-seeking or oppression, these columns are known throughout the county—and farther. It would be a calamity if such a man were to be taken from us. Those who know and respect and love Carter—and they are legion—are beseeching his Maker that he be spared for long years of the service for which he has been so eager, and for which he is so well fitted. The prayer of a great poet, "God, give us men!" has been answered in the life of this man. May that life persist to the uttermost boundaries of the human span!

It was not the sort of paragraph one expects to find in a village newspaper. It was read, and

pointed out, and quoted—and it bore the results that might have been expected. The Redfields' door was besieged by anxious inquiries, by gifts of fruit and food, by visitants of every sort. Carter himself, unconscious of having inspired so much solicitude, or of having done anything in particular to merit it beyond his plain and obvious duty, lay upstairs in ignorance of it all.

"I pray the dear fellow will live," said Lincoln Redfield, solemnly, "if only to know of that extraordinary notice and the people it brought here. It was precisely the kind of thing he himself would have been delighted to print—about another man. It's the kind of thing that has made people want to take his paper—the unusual thing. Can you remember how many times he's put in a paragraph that has waked folks up—made 'em stop and think about some cause—or some injustice, right here in the midst of us? Some people say his pen has been too caustic at times, but that was only when a caustic pen was needed and nothing else would do. It's been a kind pen, a generous pen, and time and again a humorous pen, and it's done us good to laugh in the way he's made us laugh. God spare him!"

"Amen!" ejaculated Grandfather Redfield, whose best ear had been close to his son's lips as this fervent comment was made. "Amen!—And almost the best—and the queerest—thing about that paragraph

was that Felix Rowe wrote it. I don't know that young man, these days."

Nor did anybody else. The power of a great relief—a radical unburdening of conscience, a snapping of the chains of regret and fear—to bring back to a man the buoyancy of youth and hope and purpose, had made itself evident. As he had been once, in the fiery days of his young ambition, the world all before him, so was Felix Rowe again, because he was no longer sick at heart. And as the sight of the blue sky, after the prison wall and the sentence served, brings health of mind to the one released, so there was nothing strange about the rapid recovery of this sometime invalid. In a word, he was just himself again—himself with this difference, that he was seeing, as he had never seen before, the use there may be of living. And as he gave Carter the best there was in him, both in the cherished newspaper and in the sick-room, he was saying to himself:

"In spite of everything, I don't think I was ever so much alive."

CHAPTER XXXV

"RUSTY, would you like to come in and see our patient?"

It was Burns, at ten in the morning of the fourth day after Carter's temperature had dropped from a high point to one even more dangerously low. From that moment Red had watched him as a cat does a mouse, lest he might get away. The Doctor had hardly left the house; he had been ready at every moment for emergency measures; he had tasted to the full that old, heady wine of the effort to save life, which he had drunk with such passion in all the years of his practice, till his own break had come. In his intense desire to pull Carter through he hadn't cared a particle whether he himself dropped in the old harness which he had again put on. A good way to go, he had said to himself, when in tired hours he had recognized that his patient's heart was under hardly a greater strain than his own. What better could he ask than to go out in the midst of stiff work, only so that he saw the life he was working for safe first? So he had told Ellen, his wife, and she had understood. If her prayers for him were more beseeching than those for his patient—as he knew

they were—she still gloried in his heroic service, for it was his best reward.

Rusty, blue shadows under her eyes, responded breathlessly: "Oh, Cousin Red! Does that mean ——" She couldn't quite put the question.

He nodded. "I feel pretty safe about him this morning. He didn't go nearly so low last night, and since daybreak his pulse has been getting more volume. I don't know that I'd trust you with him even yet if he hadn't asked for you so anxiously. You're not to stay long, nor get him excited, you know."

"I won't. I'll be quiet as a kitten."

She stole in, stood smiling down at Carter, her heart melting within her at sight of his face, which showed the ravages of his desperate illness. But his eye was clear, and his voice, though weak, was steady.

"Rusty! It was wonderful of you to come home —and stay."

"I couldn't have stayed away, Andy dear."

"Couldn't you?"

She saw what even that simple statement of hers did to him, weak as he was. She went on quickly:

"Cousin Red said I mustn't stay and tire you, so I——"

"Tire me! It's—life to me just to see you."

The low-breathed words made her heart leap in an astonishing way. She had never known it could do it in quite that fashion for such a cause. But she

had been finding out things in these days of anxious waiting. She had thought she was too modern, too enlightened, too free, to be caught in that old net of caring for a man—at least, so soon—caring so that it stopped her breath to think of losing him. She had had her theories, her plans; she hadn't meant to give way before the pleas of Andrew Carter or any other. And now, here she was, after the ancient fashion of woman, standing looking down at him as he lay there weak with illness, unable as yet to lift his head, yet, though he didn't know it, able to draw her to her knees at his side. She wanted to keep that light in his eyes, at any cost of betrayal of herself. Yet she remembered Red's caution. Not to-day—he mustn't be excited and tired to-day.

So she said, as serenely as she could manage, holding herself in: "If you're good, and keep very quiet to-day, I think I can really stay awhile with you to-morrow. But I must go now."

"Oh, just a minute! Stay a minute more." He held out his hand entreatingly, and she came close to him and put her own in it. He lay looking at her hand, turning it over in his once sinewy fingers. It was a firm, strong little hand, beautifully shaped; it looked as if it could pull him up from the depths of any pit, if he had been there. Before he let it go he laid it against his thin cheek, pressing it close, and Rusty found herself involuntarily and passionately

curving her fingers in to fit, as if he had been a beloved child—yet not at all as if he had been a child. A wave of tenderness lifted her to its heights—oh, he needed her so! She wanted to put her arms about him and hold him close to her fast-beating heart—Andy—Andy!—who had all but left her, who had had such a hard, lonely life and had been so plucky. No, she *must* keep a grip upon herself—she must go this instant. Gently she drew her hand away.

"I shall live on that till you come again," said a shaky voice.

She bent and whispered in his ear: "*You may!*" And fled softly out of the room.

As she passed Cousin Red, coming upstairs, he caught sight of her face. A trifle anxiously he went on into his patient's room, and gave the face upon the pillow a quick, inquiring glance. His fingers came upon a pulse decidedly quickened since he had felt it last, ten minutes before. He frowned.

"No more visitors to-day," he said, sternly. "Shut your eyes and try for some sleep now."

Andy looked up at him, smiling. "What a tyrant you are!" he breathed. "All right, I'll be good. But I'd like to get up and fight you."

"Hm-m—a fine fighter you'd make. One little push on your breastbone, and down you'd go. Slow's the word, old man, and you may as well make up your mind to it."

Andy closed his eyes. He could make up his mind to almost anything, now that he had seen Rusty—had felt her warm hand against his cheek, *pressing* against it, as if—as if—she wanted to seem near to him. Oh, yes, he could get well now, he knew he could. Who couldn't, with something like that to think of while he got through the days of convalescence?

Presently Felix came in, very quietly. But something rustled in his hand. Carter recognized that rustle. He couldn't help opening his eyes again. Felix strolled over with the fresh-inky copy of *The Eastville Arrow*, sat down by its recumbent editor, and began to read, in a low, calm tone which held, in spite of him, a singular suggestion of repressed emotion.

CARTER IS CONVALESCENT

The editor of the *Arrow* is safely past the crisis, and recovering satisfactorily from his recent severe illness. Hundreds of people breathe more easily to-day because Andrew Carter breathes more easily. Whatever, to many minds, may be the fixed standards of success or failure, there can be no question that to have so made oneself a friendly force in any community that one cannot threaten to leave it without rousing it to sorrowful protest, indicates a triumph of living to be envied—and emulated. When the editor returns to his office things will be right again in Eastville!

Carter lay staring at his temporary deputy as if he couldn't believe his ears. "Why, you old—romanticist!" he finally ejaculated. "Why, they'll

laugh their heads off at such a foolishly sentimental paragraph as that! Particularly that ending. What's the matter with you?"

"Will they?" Felix didn't look in the least cast down by this blunt criticism. "You bet they won't. I watched one old hardhead read it, just before I left the office. He'd come in to renew his subscription. The first thing he said was, 'How's Carter?' I put the paper in his hand and pointed to the paragraph. His face grew as long as his arm —he fumbled for his spectacles, and his horny old hand shook. Then he read the words, and waved the paper in the air, and pumped my hand up and down for five minutes. 'You're dead right, they *will!*' he shouted, and there was a tear running off the end of his nose as he said it—the shout joggled it off and it fell on the paper. You can see the blister of it yet."

Carter turned away his face.

Red Pepper Burns looked in. He was about to drive back to his own home. He gave a glance at his patient, and one at Rowe, and one—a suspicious one—at the paper.

"My jolly!" he growled, "will even the trusty nurse excite this man to-day? Cut out that reading—— *What were you reading?*"

"Just a little paragraph concerning the editor," Felix explained.

Burns advanced, picked up the paper. In the middle of the front page the paragraph beckoned him, with its title in caps: "CARTER IS CONVALESCENT." He read it through in silence. He laid it down. Without a word he put his hand on the patient's head, gently smoothing back the sandy hair. Then he went quietly out into the hall where it couldn't excite anybody to see that his own eyes were too misty to show him where he had left his hat. He had to grope for it before he found it.

CHAPTER XXXVI

"IS MR. ROWE in his office?"

It was a new office boy, who didn't know the son of Tracy Rowe.

"Card, sir?"

Felix produced a notebook and wrote a line; tore off the sheet and handed it to the boy. He hadn't had any cards since before the war. Nervous invalids don't have much use for them. He said to himself that he must have a new plate made at once.

On the sheet was written: "*May I see you at once? Important news of your son.*"

The boy took it in. A minute later he beckoned Felix and swung open a black walnut door, which turned noiselessly on its heavy hinges. A stout figure was advancing to meet him. Instantly the anxiety on the face of Tracy Rowe was changed to joy. His son Felix, looking as well as he had looked in the days before the Great War, was standing there smiling at him.

"Felix! My Lord, but I was scared! News of my son! Well, *what's* the news of my son?"

He was pumping Felix's arm up and down, his other hand on his son's shoulder. He was looking

closely into Felix's face, with that keen scrutiny of the successful business man which nothing ever escaped.

"The best of news, sir. I'm all right again, and I've found something to do."

"You are!—You have!—Well, well, but that's good. My word, but that's good. Sit down and tell me about it."

"Sha'n't I be interrupting?" Felix glanced at the stenographer at her desk by the window.

Mr. Rowe turned. He had forgotten the stenographer, forgotten the letter in the dictation of which he had been engaged when the message was brought to him. He pulled himself together, hurriedly finished the dictation in a style so abrupt that a day later it amazed the recipient, and dismissed Miss Rigden from the room—and for the day, though it was but three in the afternoon.

Then he turned to Felix, his face kindling afresh with pleasure. "Now," he said, "tell me all about it."

On the way down by train Felix had gone over this approaching interview in his mind. What to tell, and what to reserve? Should he burden his father and mother with the story of his unfortunate marriage, or had he done enough of owning up to that, and might he spare them the recital, now that nothing could be gained by their knowledge of it? He had come finally

to the decision that he would tell his father and would let him determine whether his mother need know. He was pretty sure what his father would say to that, and the event proved his conclusion to have been the wise one. Tracy Rowe listened in silence, his eyes never leaving Felix's face. When the story was before him, he frankly wiped his eyes, but his voice was triumphant, if a trifle husky.

"Son," he said, leaning forward, "I always knew you'd had a bad time of it, somehow, that we didn't know about. You'd never have been the way you were if you hadn't been through something pretty trying. Well!—All I can say is that you're a man to tell of it, when you might have kept still. And I'm glad it's over, and you can put it out of your head. You didn't play a dishonourable part—at least, not until you got down and out with your sufferings in those hospitals. I don't think you were really responsible for those queer feelings you had. And now you've done all you could to make up for it. If—the girl—had been living, you'd have gone and brought her home—wouldn't you?"

"I meant to," Felix said, "before I knew she wasn't living."

"Well, you'd have done it. You couldn't have rested till you had, once you saw things straight. And now—you haven't got to."

"No. But," said Felix, very quietly but with

determination, "there's one thing I must do, Father. I'm going to go over to England and find out where she's buried, and see that it's with honour, and that everything is as it should be."

Tracy Rowe nodded. "Right," he said with approval. "I'll send you over myself. I'd go with you if I could get away. And then when you come back, you can begin all over again—on a fresh sheet."

"On a fresh sheet," said his son, under his breath. "Thank God for that."

They talked everything over—Felix's plans for his work on Carter's paper and the magazine supplement, for his mode of life at Eastville.

"That little girl Rusty——" began Mr. Rowe, with a glance at Felix. "But I suppose it's too soon——"

"Rusty is going to marry Andrew Carter," Felix told him simply.

"Oh!" ejaculated his father.

And that was all that passed between them on this subject. Felix guessed, but never knew, what dreams his father had had of Rusty Redfield as a possible daughter. And Mr. Rowe never even guessed how Felix felt about Rusty. It had been only the beginning—and the ending had followed so closely upon that beginning that Felix had hardly had time to know how he felt about her before she was removed from him. But Andrew Carter had

become a brother to him—anyhow he hadn't to lose Carter, and that thought was warm in his consciousness.

"Well, I guess I ought to take you home to your mother," said Tracy Rowe, finally. "And see here, Felix—I don't know as we'd better fuss your mother with this history of yours you've told me. It's all right for me to know it, but it might kind of upset her. There isn't any real need, as I look at it, now it's all over and done. You won't worry for fear you ought to tell her, will you?"

Felix looked into his father's strong, kind face, and read there, as he had done many times before, what it meant to him to have his wife "upset."

"I think it would be much wiser not to, if you think so, too, Father," he admitted. "But it shall be just as you say."

"Then I say not." Tracy Rowe spoke, as he did in all business matters, with firmness. "There's some things that have to be told, and others that don't. And when telling can't do any good but'll only make a sort of a weak sister unhappy, why, I say spare her. But I'm glad you told the doctor and the minister and the others up there—they're the kind to understand. Your mother—isn't, not exactly. But she's a good woman, Felix, and you be nice to her. She'll be awfully glad to see you. She thinks more of you——"

"I know. And I'll do my best," said Felix, smiling.

He kept his promise. When his mother saw him and ran to him, crying, he took her in his arms and was very gentle and tender with her. If he thought of Mrs. Redfield as he did it, he instantly tried to smother the wish that all mothers were like her, remembering that in the nature of things that couldn't be, any more than all Felix Rowes could be like Robert Blacks. So he made his mother as happy as he could—which was very happy, at least for the hour. As for his father—Felix suddenly knew that his father was more to him than he had ever realized, and that he must do him honour. So he would—he vowed it in his heart. He had learned that, among many things, from the Redfields.

CHAPTER XXXVII

FROM Andrew Carter to Ruth Rust Redfield:

Rusty Mine:

Back in the office! I could shout it, both aloud and in the columns of the *Arrow*. The old place looks like Paradise to me, though it's precisely as grubby as ever, and I don't think there's been a fresh towel hung on the nail since I got sick. When I pointed this out to Felix he declared that fresh towels were unknown in the history of the newspaper world, and that we'd be out of luck if we sent the black rag that hangs there now to the laundry. Privately, however, and as it were under his breath, he showed me where he kept a reserve in a corner of the closet, on which he wipes his face in an emergency. I always knew the fellow was resourceful, and this proves it!

News! Now that I'm back Felix asks for three weeks off—and for what do you think? To make a quick trip to England and look up his wife's family, and her grave, and see that the place is properly marked and cared for. I like that, don't you?

When that's done I think the last barrier between our friend and his complete efficiency will have been levelled. I'm looking forward to his return.

He'll be back in time for our wedding. We really couldn't have it without him, could we? Doesn't that seem odd, recalling the "wintry boarder" whom we so despised? It doesn't pay to despise anybody in this world; there's almost always a reason why in the end one is ashamed and sorry over having thought too ill of a fellow mortal.

Dearest, I'm having a terrible time, trying to hold myself down to the ordinary news items and carefully conceived editorials. If the old *Arrow* should print what its editor is full of, some of its paragraphs would electrify the town. For instance, and to relieve a bit of pressure:

> Carter walks on air this week. As we go to press he is in receipt of a letter from his fiancée, Miss Redfield, which puts him into a condition little short of delirious. Thus far she has withheld from him much of her real state of mind concerning her approaching marriage, but in this letter she admits—oh, glorious!—that she will be glad to live under the same roof with him, even though it leaks. It will not leak—she may rest assured of that. The editor is a handy man with tools, as he has need to be in the *Arrow* establishment, and he will engage that not a lovely, rust-coloured hair on her head will be touched by moisture.

What about a few items like that? Why, my love, the circulation would go up by leaps in a week!

Well, then, suppose we put in a nice conservative statement like this:

Miss Ruth Rust Redfield returns from college next week, with the degree of Bachelor of Arts. Heaven bless her! She will now enter the University of Life, where she will prepare to take still higher degrees—Master of Hearts, Past-Mistress of Homes, and——

I dare not go on. Will they have red hair, dear? I hope so.

Anyhow, they'll be of the Redfields, and that's enough for me.

Yours ever—and ever,

ANDY.

THE END

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